

Nehemiah's Burden

Text: Nehemiah 1:1-11

Introduction:

1. Historical Background
 - a. In Jeremiah's day, the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem (586 B.C.), burned the city gates, broke down the walls and took many Jews captive. People like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and Ezekiel were among the captives.
 - b. At the end of 70 years according to Jeremiah's prophecy, the Persians conquer the Babylonians and the remnant is allowed by King Cyrus to return to build the temple under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua. 50,000 Jews return. Discouraged, the Jews abandoned work of rebuilding the temple after the foundation was complete.
 - c. About sixteen years later, when people had settled down to dwell in their own homes, God raised Haggai and Zechariah, to exhort the people to complete the Temple. The temple was "completed" some 20 years later. (520 – 516 B.C.)
 - d. 60 more years passed during which more Jews returned under Ezra in 458 B.C. Final restoration of Temple vessels, the training of priesthood and some finishing touches of the building were completed under Ezra.
 - e. "... for more than ninety years after the first Jews returned from Babylon the walls of Jerusalem remained desolate and the people of God lived in affliction and shame.. It was at this juncture, in the year 445 B.C., that a man was raise up of God to match the need of the hour. Fourteen years after Ezra's return, God spoke to Nehemiah, prepared him for the task and called him to serve the Lord in the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem."
Alan Redpath (Victorious Christian Service)
2. Nehemiah documents the rebuilding of the walls. Walls speak of separation and protection. The temple represents propagation; the place where God's light to the Gentiles was disseminated. The walls represent separation and distinction from the Gentile nations. **Both** work together, both are vital!
3. The impact of Nehemiah:
 - a. It is a Book of **Rebuilding** – there are many principles we learn for Christian service such as the necessity of prayer, planning and united effort.
 - b. It is a Book of **Resistance** – it shows us the type of opposition that we can expect as we build for God; opposition that comes both from without and within.
 - c. It is a Book of **Revival** – we see the centrality of the Word of God in bringing about a spiritual renewal and awakening in the people of God.

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

I. Nehemiah's Identity (Vs. 1)

A. His Pedigree (Vs. 1)

1. Little known except for the fact that he is referred to as “the son of Hachaliah”
2. He is obviously a Jew by the reference to his brother from Judah in Vs. 2.
3. The time referenced is the month ‘Chisleu’ which would equate roughly to December on our calendar.

B. His Position (Vs. 11)

1. Nehemiah held the position of cupbearer to the great Artaxerxes Longimanus who ruled Persia from 464 to 423 B.C.
2. A cupbearer was more than a lowly waiter; his was a high position of influence with the king. His duty was to test the king's wine before giving it to the king to ensure it wasn't poisoned. This meant he had to be someone of the highest integrity; someone the king could trust with his life. This made a man in this position a confidant of the king.

II. Nehemiah's Inquiry (Vs. 2-3)

A. The Request (Vs. 2)

1. He enquires of the people
2. He enquires of the place
3. Note: Nehemiah held a high and respected position but he cared about the state of the people of God enough to ask! Some prefer to bury their heads in the sand and plead ignorance. Not with Nehemiah.

B. The Report (Vs. 3)

1. The people – are in affliction and reproach
2. The place – walls and gates still in an broken down position

C. The Response (Vs. 4)

1. He sorrowed
 - a. He sat down
 - b. He wept – a type of Christ who wept over Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives
 - c. He mourned
 - d. His sorrow was caused by the report he heard.
 - e. Question: Do we have a heart burden for the work of God? Are our hearts burdened for lost souls, broken by sin? Are we burdened for believers who through their backslidings have allowed the walls to be smashed in their lives?
 - f. Illustration: Christ's compassion towards the multitudes – Matthew 9:36 *“But when he saw the multitudes, he was **moved**”*

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.”

- g. Samuel Hadley: From a book called, *Down Water Street*. One late night, Sam Hadley of the Waterstreet Mission, took a friend down town to see the state of the city. As they walked through that derelict area, they saw sin in the raw - drunks lying in the gutter, immorality, cursing. All of a sudden, Sam slumped against a gas-light pole and began to convulse. At first his friend thought that Sam was having a heart attack. No, Sam was not having a heart attack; he was in a paroxysm of grief over the sight of the human wreckage before him. He was heard as saying, “Oh God, the sin of this city is breaking my heart.”
2. He sought the Lord.

III. Nehemiah’s Intercession (Vs. 5-11)

* A true work of God must begin in prayer, be sustained through prayer, and finish with prayer. This marks the first of 12 instances of prayer in the Book of Nehemiah. The Book starts with prayer and finishes with prayer! Nehemiah sought the ear of his Heavenly King before seeking the help of the earthly king. “There’s too much working before men and not enough waiting before God.” (Redpath) We note 4 key elements to Nehemiah’s prayer.

A. Passion (fervency) (Vs. 4)

1. James 5:16 “...*The effectual **fervent** prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*”
2. ‘fervent’ = comes from the root word meaning to energize. English word fervent means hot, boiling.
3. E.M. Bounds: “Without continuance the prayer may go unanswered. Importunity is made up of the ability to hold on, to press on, to wait with unrelaxed and unrelaxable grasp, restless desire and restful patience. Importunate prayer is not an incident, but the main thing, not a performance but a passion, not a need but a necessity. Prayer in its highest form and grandest success assumes the attitude of a wrestler with God. It is the contest, trial and victory of faith; **a victory not secured from an enemy, but from Him who tries our faith that He may enlarge it: that tests our strength to make us stronger**...There is neither encouragement nor room in Bible religion for feeble desires, listless efforts, lazy attitudes; all must be strenuous, urgent, ardent. Inflamed desires, impassions, unwearied insistence delight Heaven. God would have His children incorrigibly in earnest and persistently bold in their efforts...Our whole being must be in our praying; like John Know, we must say and feel, “Give me Scotland, or I die.” (Purpose in Prayer P. 46)
4. Psalm 126:5 “*They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.*”

B. Adoration (Vs. 5)

1. God’s exalted position – “LORD God of heaven”
2. God’s majestic person – “great and terrible God”
 - a. ‘great’ = in position and power

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

- b. 'terrible' = means to fear. Reference to the fact that God is to be revered, honoured and respected.
- 3. God's faithful promises – "keepeth covenant and mercy"
- 4. Note: True prayer must begin with a lofty view of God.

C. Confession (Vs. 6-7)

- 1. Israel's sinful condition (Vs. 6)
 - a. Nehemiah recognizes that sin is first and foremost an offence against God – "we have sinned against thee" (Vs. 6); "We have dealt very corruptly against thee" (Vs. 7)
 - b. Nehemiah includes himself amongst the people of God (humility) Isaiah had a similar experience. Isaiah 6:5 *"Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."*
- 2. Israel's specific corruptions (Vs. 7)
 - a. They were corrupt
 - b. They were disobedient (hence the reason for their judgment)

D. Petition (Vs. 8-11)

- 1. The basis of the petition (Vs. 8-10)
 - a. Nehemiah pleaded with God on the basis of the promises He had made to His people.
 - b. Nehemiah's prayers were Scripture soaked!
- 2. The focus of the petition (Vs. 11)
 - a. That God would hear their prayer
 - b. That God would prosper him
 - c. Like Esther, Nehemiah needed God's power to work in the heart of a very powerful and heathen king.
 - d. "It is possible to move men through God by prayer alone" (Hudson Taylor)

Conclusion:

- 1. Do we have a heart burden for the work of God?
- 2. Are we praying for the work of God?
- 3. Will we volunteer to be a vessel for God to use in His work?

God's Work done in God's Way

Text: Nehemiah 2:1-10

Introduction:

1. Nehemiah is the last of the O.T. books along with Malachi.
2. Malachi was a contemporary of Nehemiah and his book details the spiritual condition of the people of that time (e.g. robbing God of tithes and offerings)
3. Hudson Taylor: "God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply"
4. Outline of Chapter 2
 - I. The Providential Opening of the Work (1-4)
 - II. The Provisions for the Work (5-8)
 - III. The Provokers of the Work (9-10)
 - IV. The Planning of the Work (11-16)
 - V. The Promoting of the Work (17-18)
 - VI. The Provoking of the Work (19-20)

I. The Providential Opening of the Work (Vs. 1-4)

A. The Waiting of Nehemiah (Vs. 1)

1. The account began in the month 'Chisleu' (1:1)
2. It is now the month 'Nisan' which would equate to our April. Nisan marked the beginning of the Jewish and Persian year and would have been a time of celebration.
3. Four months had elapsed since Nehemiah was first stirred about the mission in Jerusalem.
4. "It is in this way God both tries and strengthens the faith of His people. He waits while they wait. But if He wait, it is only to shut His people up to more entire dependence upon Himself, and thus to prepare their hearts more fully for the blessing He is about to bestow. And when He steps in, it is oftentimes, as in this case, in such a quiet and unseen way – unseen by all but the eye of faith – that it needs the exercise of faith to detect His presence." (E. Dennett)

B. The Moving of God (Vs. 2-4)

1. God worked in the heart of the king (2-4a)
 - a. A true miracle since this same king had previously halted the rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 4)
 - b. This day a significant day in God's calendar for His people as it marked the commencement of Daniel's 70 week prophecy. It was 483 years from this date (69 weeks) that Messiah was "cut off" (Dan. 9:26)
 - c. Note: In seeking to accomplish the call of God in our lives, we need to remember that God works in and through our

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

authorities. Nehemiah's tone is respectful, humble and one of entreaty; not one of demand and assumption. He took the position of a loyal subject.

- d. We do not step around the authorities God has placed in our lives to get the work of God done. We trust God to work in the heart of that authority to bring about His will. Note: Limits to all authority (Acts 5:29)
2. Nehemiah prayed before answering the king's offer (4b)
 - a. Nehemiah's prayer has been described as "the arrow prayer" or "the emergency prayer"
 - b. This was the pattern of Nehemiah's life. He lived out the truth of Proverbs 3:5-6 – *"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."*
 - c. The principle we learn is that the believer has constant access to the throne room of heaven in any time, place or circumstance. We need to get in the habit of walking closely with God each hour of each day.
 - d. We also learn the principle that short, powerful prayers, are an outflow of a strong devotional life. Short prayers like this in the public, day to day challenges are linked to the more lengthy prayers in our private devotional lives.

II. The Provisions for the Work (Vs. 5-8)

Nehemiah requested 3 provisions from the king:

A. To be Sent (Vs. 5-6)

1. The principle of commission is in view
2. It is important that before embarking on a mission for the Lord that we know that He has sent us. If we know we are sent, then that will help us to stay there when the going gets tough.

B. To be Safe (Vs. 7)

1. Artaxerxes also provided an entourage of soldiers (Vs. 9)
2. God will provide safety for His servants until it is His time for them to be taken.

C. To be Supplied (Vs. 8)

1. God will provide the resources needed to accomplish the work He has called us to. In this case, the Lord used a pagan king to supply his servants.
2. Normally in Scripture we see that God normally supplies for His work through the freewill offerings of God's people.
3. Heaven's resources are available for those who are doing God's work! John 14:14

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

4. Nehemiah acknowledges that it was the hand of God that had worked on his behalf with the king

III. The Provokers of the Work (Vs. 9-10)

A. Their Identity (10a)

1. Sanballat the Horonite
 - a. A prominent official in Samaria (4:2)
 - b. Samaritans were a mixed multitude who populated the Northern Kingdom after its destruction by the Assyrians (2 Kings 17:24)
 - c. Sanballat is called a Horonite is generally supposed to mean a native of Horonaim, a city of Moab (Ironsides)
2. Tobiah the Ammonite
 - a. Descendent of Lot (Gen. 19:30-38)
 - b. The Ammonites and Moabites were relatives of the children of Israel.
 - c. Note: Beware of the opposition that can come from family!
 - d. Tobiah had connections in Jerusalem that caused Nehemiah untold grief.
 - e. "If Sanballat was in charge of the army, then Tobiah was director of the intelligence division of their operation...Nehemiah would soon discover that his biggest problem was not the enemy on the outside but the compromisers on the inside, a problem the church still faces today." (Wiersbe)
3. Keil: "These two individuals were undoubtedly influential chiefs of the neighboring hostile nations of Samaritans and Ammonites, and sought by alliances with the Jewish nobles (cp. 6:17; 13:4,28) to frustrate, whether by force or stratagem, the efforts of Ezra and Nehemiah for the internal and external security of Judah."

B. Their Indignation (10b)

1. It was in their interest to see the people of God continue in a state of defeat.
2. They understood that Nehemiah's aim to rebuild the walls came from his motivation to help the people.
3. Principle: A defeated, compromised people are not a threat to Satan and his kingdom. But let the people of God embark on a quest for revival and restoration, and opposition erupts very quickly.
4. The world is quite comfortable with a compromised believer. But let a believer draw some clear lines of separation in his life, and he will find the world a ready enemy.

Conclusion: Are we waiting upon God to bring about the fulfilment of His calling? Do we have faith in God to supply? Are we being vigilant in the work of God, recognizing the spiritual battle that exists?

Commencing the Work

Text: Nehemiah 2:11-20

Introduction:

1. Brief review of previous lesson
2. Nehemiah teaches us many lessons about Christian service
3. Outline of Chapter 2
 - I. The Providential Opening of the Work (1-4)
 - II. The Provisions for the Work (5-8)
 - III. The Provokers of the Work (9-10)
 - IV. The Planning of the Work (11-16)
 - V. The Promoting of the Work (17-18)
 - VI. The Persisting in the Work (19-20)

I. The Planning of the Work (Vs. 11-16)

A. The Secrecy of his preparation (Vs. 11-12, 16)

1. Principle of Timing:
 - a. Nehemiah did not unveil his heart burden straight away. Nehemiah exemplifies for us the important principle of discerning the right timing for key steps in the will of God
 - b. The presence of enemies would have influenced this decision (Vs. 10). Sanballat and Tobiah at this stage were only aware that a high ranking official of the Persian Empire had come with a heart of concern for the people of God. We need to be careful not to give the enemy advanced notice of what plan to do for God.
2. Principle of Trust
 - a. It appears that Nehemiah had several close associates he could trust who went to share the burden with him
 - b. Illustration: When Saul was made king, the Lord provided a “band of men, whose hearts God had touched.” (1 Samuel 10:26)
 - c. Illustration: Onesiphorus – 2 Timothy 1:16-17 *“The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain: But, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me.”*

B. The Surveying of the destruction (Vs. 13-15)

1. Wiersbe: “Leaders are often awake when others are asleep, and working when others are resting.”
2. If we are going to be rebuilders for God, we have to be humble and real about the state of affairs. We must view the wreckage honestly.

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

3. Nehemiah now verifies the report that he had heard from Hanani in Chapter 1
4. Chapter 3 reveals that Nehemiah approached the broken down walls with a clear, structured plan. Nehemiah was a master planner.

II. The Promoting of the Work (Vs. 17-18)

Nehemiah was not a one man band. He understood the principle of teamwork. A leader can have a God given vision for the work of God, but he cannot accomplish it alone.

A. Explanation (17a)

1. Nehemiah uses the personal pronoun 'we'. He identifies with the people and the situation.
2. Nehemiah is crystal clear about the task at hand. He does not soften the blow or talk around it.

B. Exhortation (17b)

1. Nehemiah now seeks to rouse God's people to action. In essence, he says, here is the situation, now let's do something about it.
2. Application: As a church, we need to be moved to action in the service of the Lord
3. What are you doing in response to the needs? Are you a participator or a spectator? So often believers treat the work of God like a sports match. They sit and watch while a small minority play the game.

C. Encouragement (Vs. 18)

1. Nehemiah shares a word of testimony concerning how God had moved in answer to prayer. Nehemiah's work from start to finish was God centered and God focused.
2. The people respond positively and get behind Nehemiah's vision
3. Personal Testimony: God's calling to Adelaide and NBC

III. The Persisting in the Work (Vs. 19-20)

We need to be in the work of God for the long haul. There are many starters but few finishers. Determination, persistence and hard work in the face of opposition are necessary character qualities for Christian service.

A. The Opposition of the enemy (Vs. 19)

1 Corinthians 16:9 *"For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries."*

1. They scorned
2. They slandered
 - a. They questioned their motives, a common weapon used in a word war

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

- b. A question can have slanderous overtones; it can have an accusation embedded into it (e.g. Satan's question to Eve in the garden). This question had strong political overtones. But the implied accusation was completely wrong!
 - c. Their opposition did take on a violent dimension later on, but on the whole, the enemies of God waged a war of words.
 - d. Words are powerful tools for good or evil. "*Death and life are in the power of the tongue...*" (Prov. 18:21)
 - e. Proverbs 25:18 "A man that beareth false witness against his neighbor is a maul, and a sword and a sharp arrow." 'maul' = a wooden hammer used in battle
3. The underlying motive: To cause the work to cease (4:11)

B. The Resolution of Nehemiah (Vs. 20)

1. He ignored the accusation: We do not have to chase after every rumor and distraction that comes our way as we serve the Lord. If we do, the work will suffer. Nehemiah did not even address the slanderous accusation.
2. He invoked God's authority: When the work is of God, we need not fear the opposition. We are going to have to learn the art of combining spiritual service with spiritual warfare. We are need to be both workers and warriors
3. He insisted on a line of separation: The enemies of God had no legal rights or claim to Jerusalem

Conclusion:

1. What are you doing for the cause of Christ?
2. How are you responding to opposition? Are you getting distracted?

Laborers Together (1)

Text: Nehemiah 3:1-32

Introduction:

1. 1 Corinthians 3:9 *“For we are laborers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building.”*
2. The commitment of the people in Chapter 2 to the work is now bearing fruit in action.
3. This chapter reveals the wisdom the Lord gave Nehemiah for coordinating this great task.
4. This chapter reveals that the people “had a mind to work” and the job was done in 52 days, a phenomenal achievement.
5. Overview of map: Northern wall (Vs. 1-7); Western Wall (Vs. 8-13); Southern Wall (Vs. 14) & Eastern Wall (Vs. 15-32)
 - 10 gates mentioned
 - Some illustrations of spiritual truth in the gates – Sheep gate = Christ the Lamb of God; Valley Gate = picture of humility; Dung Gate = removing defilements from our lives; Fountain & Water Gates = the Word and the Spirit; Horse Gate = spiritual warfare; East Gate = return of Christ

As we analyze this phenomenal team of workers we will note 4 key ingredients that contributed to their success in the work of God:

I. **Cohesion – “next unto them/him...after him/them repaired”**

There were two things that contributed to their unity

A. **Direction –Guidance/Leadership**

1. They were united behind Nehemiah’s leadership (2:18)
2. Our job is to follow the leaders God raises up as they lead us scripturally.
3. Three times the Apostle Paul exhorted the believers to follow him: 1 Cor. 4:16 *“Wherefore I beseech you, **be ye followers of me.**”* 1 Cor. 11:1 *“**Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.**”* Phil. 3:17 *“Brethren, **be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.**”*

B. **Destination – Goal/Objective**

1. When we all know what the goal is, and we all strive for that goal, we will find ourselves a unified people. Sometimes churches resemble the confusion that reigned in the temple of Diana in Acts 19:32 – *“Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together.”* Sometimes churches can be like the

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

Israelites were in the Book of Judges where everyone does that which is right in their own eyes (Judges 21:25)

2. The task for the children of Israel was clear: the walls and gates were to be rebuilt. This would help preserve the purity of their witness so that they might be a light to the Gentiles. They were all on the same page that this was what was to be done!
 - a. **Walls:** Denote separation and protection, a line of demarcation.
 - b. **Gates:** A point of access but monitored access with the ability to discriminate. Refer 7:3 & 13:9
 - c. Note: There is an important link between separation (the walls) and propagation (the temple)
3. Similar to Israel, the church is commissioned with the light of the Gospel. This is our main task as a church (Matthew 28:18-20). As we witness for Christ, we are to construct spiritual fortifications (separation principle) for the preservation of the truth. The church is called “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). We are exhorted to “earnestly contend for the faith” (Jude 1:3)
4. Phil. 1:27 *“Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that **ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;**”*
5. 1 Cor. 1:10 *“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be **perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.**”*
6. Illustration: Early church’s success largely due to the fact it was a united church – “in one accord, in one place” They were both a separated church and a propagating church. We all need to have this same vision as well.
7. 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 – The church likened to a body

II. Motivation

A. The Sense of Mission

1. They were involved in something significant.
2. They had purpose and direction (last point)

B. The Safety of Family

1. “over against his house” – Vs. 10, 12, 23, 28, 29, 30
2. Alan Redpath: “That is where every real work for God must begin – at home...A church is no stronger than its homes, for a church is made up of families.”
3. Principle: When we see the part walls play in the spiritual safety of our families, we will be motivated to help build them.
4. The importance of having a fortified home

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

5. The importance of your family being in a fortified church
6. Note: The attitude that says, “I’ll toe the line at church and play the part because I have to but then live however I like at home” is destructive. The truth is the same whether you are at home or in church!

C. The Skills of Individuals

1. Nehemiah set others to work in areas that would have been of particular interest & relevance to them. For example, The priests area (Vs. 1) and the merchants area (Vs. 31)
2. Be open to leadership as to what part you play in your local church

Conclusion:

1. Are you a contributor to church unity? Eph. 4:3 *“Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”*
2. Are you focused on the task the Lord has given us to reach the world for Christ and build ourselves up in the faith?

Go, labour on; spend, and be spent; Thy joy to do the Father’s will; It is the way the Master went, Should not the servant tread it still?

Go, labour on; tis not for naught; Thy earthly loss is heavenly gain; Men heed thee, love thee, praise thee, not; The Master praises – what are men?

Laborers Together (2)

Text: Nehemiah 3:1-32

Introduction:

1. 1 Corinthians 3:9 *“For we are laborers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building.”*
2. The commitment of the people in Chapter 2 to the work is now bearing fruit in action.
3. This chapter reveals that the people “had a mind to work” and the job was done in 52 days, a phenomenal achievement.
4. Overview of map: Northern wall (Vs. 1-7); Western Wall (Vs. 8-13); Southern Wall (Vs. 14) & Eastern Wall (Vs. 15-32)

As we analyze this phenomenal team of workers we will note 4 key ingredients that contributed to their success in the work of God:

I. Cohesion (unity)

There were two things that contributed to their unity

A. Direction –Guidance/Leadership

B. Destination – Goal/Objective

C. Summary: What a picture is presented here of a large group of people working harmoniously towards a clear objective. Everyone had a clear understanding of what needed to be done. They were not all doing what was right in their own eyes (Judges 21:25)

II. Motivation

A. The Sense of Mission

B. The Safety of Family

C. The Skills of Individuals

III. Participation

D.L. Moody: “A great many people have got a false idea about the church. They have got an idea that the church is a place to rest in...to get into a nicely cushioned pew, and contribute to the charities, listen to the minister, and do their share to keep the church out of bankruptcy, is all they want. The idea of work for them – actual work in the church – never enters their minds.” The word ‘work’ appears 21 times in the Book of Nehemiah.

A. The Diversity of the participants

1. The High Priest, priests & Levites (Vs. 1, 17, 22) representing the spiritual leaders of the nation.

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

2. Son of one of the Apothecaries (Vs. 8). These were the perfume makers. E.g. A special anointing oil for the service of the temple (Ex. 30:25, 35). Sweet odors and spices for the purpose of embalming (2 Chr. 16:14)
3. Rulers (Vs. 9, 12, 14-19)
 - a. A prominent feature of this work. Those in positions of leadership did not deem themselves to be above the work. Their presence amongst the common people was powerfully motivating.
 - b. One of the rulers repaired the dung gate (Vs. 14)
 - c. Nehemiah, the highest authority in the country at that time set a similar example (4:23) Note: Those with the gift of organization need to remember to get their hands dirty as well!
 - d. Servant Leadership is the model the Bible presents – Luke 22:24-26
 - e. Leaders need to practice what they preach to others.
4. Goldsmiths & Merchants (Vs. 8, 31-32)
 - a. These would represent the business men of today
 - b. 1 Tim. 6:17-19 *“Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they **do good**, that they be **rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.**”*
5. Many others either **unnamed** (Vs. 2, 5, 7, 26) or **unknown** (Vs. 7)
 - a. These men may be largely unknown to us but they obviously were not unknown to God as He chose to note their participation in this great work in His eternal Word.
 - b. Many of us will not be remembered for our labors for the Lord in this life. Many of us will be obscure so far as reputation amongst men is concerned. This matters little as our service is known in heaven (Heb. 6:10) and it is the “well done” of our Saviour that is our goal and aim (Matt. 25:21).
 - c. Therefore, It is wise for us not to compare ourselves with others – 2 Cor 10:12 *“For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.”*

B. The Degrees of participation

1. Note: On the whole, there was tremendous participation but even then we still see some degrees of participation we can learn from.
2. Some didn't participate at all! (Vs. 5) Unlike the other rulers named in the passage, these nobles felt they were above such labors.

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

3. Some went the extra mile (Vs. 19, 21, 24, 27, 30). Many choose to do their assigned part and no more. These folk were available to do extra over and above what they were assigned. They were second mile people.
4. Some worked with passion (Vs. 20) 'earnestly' = means to glow warm, wax hot

IV. Organization

A. An ordered approach to the work

1. 1 Cor. 14:33, 40 *"For God is not the author of confusion...Let all things be done decently and in order."*
2. Corinthian context: A divided, carnal, yet gifted church!
3. 'decently' = proper, fitting 'order' = idea of arrangement
4. We need to plan our work and work our plan!
5. We need to approach the work of the Lord with a "striving for excellence" attitude
6. Nehemiah divided this massive project into 42 work areas and assigned teams to each one. No one man can achieve a task of this magnitude on his own.
7. Our job is to find our place of service on God's construction team and build.
8. We need to learn to see our part in relation to the whole!

B. A overseen approach to the work

1. Leadership essential. This is why our chief Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, appoints under-shepherds for His local churches.
2. Eph. 4:11-12 *"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:"*
3. Godly leadership a blessing, not a blight.

Conclusion:

1. Are you a contributor or a spectator in God's work?
2. Do you see the value of your contribution, small though it may seem, to the great objectives of the local church?
3. Are we striving for excellence in what we do for the Lord? Do we approach it in a disciplined and structured way or are we careless and lazy?

Working & Warring (1)

Text: Nehemiah 4:1-6

Introduction:

1. This chapter: The battle erupts as the walls are being built. In the Christian life have to learn to be servants & soldiers, builders & battlers, workers & warriors. **Both** are necessary.
2. A defeated Christian, whose life is broken down, will not encounter much conflict in His Christian experience but a Christian who is serious about building walls of separation will!
3. Walls = denote protection and separation, a line of demarcation. Gates = a monitored point of access
4. In this chapter, we note three tactics used by the enemy to try and stop the work of God: 1. Contempt 2. Conspiracy 3. Compromise

In this lesson we note the first of the three (contempt) and how it was overcome:

I. The Cause of the Contempt (Vs. 1)

A. Activity (1a)

1. "we build the wall" = the work of God was progressing
2. Spiritual activity in the Lord's work will attract the wrath of the wicked one and His evil forces
3. Ironside: "Heretofore the line of demarcation between the outwardly separated Israelites and these mixed nations had been almost obliterated, hence there was peace & quietness. But now a man has come who contemplates rearing a fresh wall of exclusion, and this is bitterly resented."
4. Opposition is not to be viewed as an unexpected intruder, but as a certainty for those who engage in the Lord's work. Opposition is an encouragement as it is a sign a work is going on for Him. (Lacey)

B. Anger (1b)

1. "wrath...great indignation" = the source of the mockery
2. 2:10 "*When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of it, **it grieved them exceedingly** that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel.*"

II. The Characteristics of the Contempt (Vs. 2-3)

A. Scorn (Vs. 2)

1. What do these feeble Jews? = he highlights the apparent weakness of the people of God. The world fails to understand that the success

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

of God's work is not dependent upon the weakness of man but upon the power of God. (1 Cor. 1:26-31; 2 Cor. 12:9-10)

2. Will they fortify themselves? = he understood the purpose of what they were doing. The world scorns the believer as he endeavors to strengthen and build up his life on the Word of God (Jude 1:20)
3. Will they sacrifice? = he understood the connection between the building of the walls and the success of the temple worship
4. Will they make an end in a day? = he implied they had not taken into account the magnitude of the task and would give up. In essence he says "will they finish it today?"
5. Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish? = he mocked the materials they were seeking to use.
 - i. Graphic picture. With the exception of new timber for the burn out gates, the material for the wall came from the existing stones from the old wall.
 - ii. Principle: Our need is not so much for innovation as it is for reformation. Our need is for a revival and renewal of the old paths, not something novel and "up to date"
 - iii. Our adherence to the old stones of truth is what invokes the laughter and scorn of the world. "What! You actually believe in the virgin birth?" "You actually believe that Christ is the only way of salvation?" "You actually believe the Bible is the Word of God?" "What! You actually believe in personal holiness & purity?"

B. Sarcasm (Vs. 3)

1. Tobiah takes the scorn to the next level and tries to imply that their efforts are worthless.
2. There was falsehood in his taunt. In actual fact, the wall that was being built and the people of God would be a strong, formidable fortress. Archeologist estimate the wall would have been about 9ft (3 meters) thick.
3. If his statement were true, why were they even taking any notice of what they were doing? Why raise up any opposition to something so weak? The reality is that they knew that what they were witnessing was something of substance, hence their anger and opposition.
4. Never underestimate the potency of a word war to undermine and damage a work of God. Prov. 18:21 "*Death and life are in the power of the tongue...*" Proverbs 25:18 "*A man that beareth false witness against his neighbor is a maul, and a sword and a sharp arrow.*" 'maul' = a wooden hammer used in battle

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

III. The Conquering of the Contempt (Vs. 4-6)

A. Prayer (Vs. 4-5)

1. Nehemiah does not respond in kind. We do not lower ourselves to the level of the enemy and use the same sort of weapons as them. **We do not achieve something spiritual by being carnal!** James 1:20 informs us that “...*the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.*”
2. Nehemiah used spiritual weapons to combat what was ultimately spiritual opposition. Similarly, the believer is equipped for spiritual warfare with the armor of God (Eph. 6:10-18)
3. The centrality of prayer in Nehemiah’s life is again highlighted. The work commences in prayer, is sustained by prayer and concludes with prayer. He takes his problems to the Lord. There is no higher court of appeal than the throne room of heaven!
4. Some observations concerning the prayer itself:
 - a. It’s quality – a strong imprecatory prayer. He prays that God will deal firmly with the opposition. We ought to have strong feelings for the glory of God when we see His Name desecrated and blasphemed.
 - b. It’s motive – the glory of God. Helps us understand the severity of the prayer. Nehemiah did not pray this way because of self-interest and self-concern. He was zealous for the work of God.

B. Performance (Vs. 6)

1. Their achievement (6a)
 - a. The enemy’s purpose was to obstruct the progress of the work. Their desire was “to hinder it” (Vs. 8) and to “cause the work to cease” (Vs. 11)
 - b. The people of God did not cooperate with the enemy’s design and refused to be distracted from the task
 - c. Note Nehemiah’s words in 6:3 “*And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?*”
 - d. What do we do when we are opposed in the work of God?
Answer: Keep on keeping on! Stay on the job! Keep building!
2. Their attitude (6b)
 - a. The secret to their success
 - b. The people of God had a working mindset

Conclusion:

1. Which side of the battle are you on? Are you both a servant & a soldier?
2. Are we fighting the battle with spiritual weaponry or the weapons of the flesh?

Working & Warring (2)

Text: Nehemiah 4:7-15

Introduction:

1. This chapter: The battle erupts as the walls are being built. In the Christian life have to learn to be servants & soldiers, builders & battlers, workers & warriors. **Both** are necessary.
2. The enemy's attacks are relentless, persistent and they intensify as the work sees success.
3. The timing is at the half way point when the strain of the load begins to set in
4. In this chapter, we note the two waves of attack used by the enemy to try and stop the work of God: 1. Contempt 2. Conspiracy

In this lesson we note the second phase of the attack (conspiracy) and how it was overcome:

I. The Provocation of the Conspiracy (Vs. 7-8, 11)

The progress of the work arouses the fury of the enemy and the battle intensifies.

A. The People (Vs. 7)

1. Their Identity
 - a. North: Sanballat & Samaritans
 - b. East: Tobiah & Ammonites
 - c. South: Geshem & Arabians
 - d. West: Ashdodites (Philistines)
 - e. The people of God were literally **surrounded** by enemies. We often find ourselves in a similar place. But we need to be reminded that we are not just surrounded by enemies, we are also surrounded by the Lord!
 - i. Psalm 34:7 *"The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them."*
 - ii. Illustration: 2 Kings 6:14-16 – *"Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them."*
2. Their Unity
 - a. Note: They all conspired 'together' (Vs. 7)
 - b. These factions often in conflict with one another but they united quickly against God, His people and His work.
 - c. Illustration: The many faces of the world united against Christ at His crucifixion
 - i. Pilate and Herod united (Luke 23:12)
 - ii. Civil and Ecclesiastical authorities united
 - iii. Sadducee and Pharisee united

B. The Plan (Vs. 8)

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

1. To Fight – while Christians waste time arguing whether we should be involved in the battle, the enemy is resolved to wage war!
2. To Hinder – Their resolve was to stop the work of God. "...cause the work to cease." (Vs. 11)
3. To Infiltrate (Vs. 11) – The enemy would seek to use subtility and surprise (guerilla warfare)
 - i. This is how the wicked one works. E.g. The apostates in Jude 1:4 are described as "certain men crept in unawares". From the beginning, Satan has used subtility to attack the people of God (Gen. 3)
 - ii. "Though the enemy likes to operate secretly by sneaky conduct and disguised doings, it is still very difficult to convince church people of this feature of the enemy. Many church folk seem to not want to see evil in anything and refuse to believe the warnings given by the men of God of the hidden evil in so many things today. But sticking our head in the sand to ignore the ways of evil is only to give evil a great advantage over us." John G. Butler

II. The Promoters of the Conspiracy (Vs. 10-12)

The enemy from without utilizes sympathizers from within. The heat of the battle tends to bring to surface the weak points amongst the people of God.

A. The Complainers (Vs. 10)

1. The source: Tribe of Judah
 - a. Judah was the strong, kingly tribe! Opposition often comes from the most unexpected sources
 - b. Wiersbe: "In over forty years of ministry, I have learned that, in the Lord's work, discouragers are often doubters and compromisers. There is usually something wrong in their spiritual walk."
 - c. Their problem was genuine but their conclusions were wrong.
2. The motive: Judah's family connections!
 - a. Tobiah had a close relationship with Judah through his wife and daughter in law (6:18-19) and he knew just how to pull the family strings to his advantage. "The ties of marriage were stronger than their bonds of commitment to the Lord" (Wiersbe)
 - b. Marriages with the heathen were forbidden by God for His people.
 - c. Butler: "Some of Nehemiah's worst problems from within the camp came from people involved with bad marriages. Unsanctified marriages are always a pain in the neck to the work of God. We have personally found in our over forty years of ministry that those who are problems (the murmurers, complainers, dissidents, discouragers etc...) in the church frequently have marriage problems. In fact,

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

marriage problems are almost always present with troublemakers in the church. Either the marriage is a forbidden one (such as a saved person marrying an unsaved person or a divorced person remarrying), or the marriage does not follow Biblical guidelines (such as the wife wears the pants and is the dominate one in the marriage and not the husband).

- d. Warning! We have a tendency to invoke the “its family” exception clause in order to make compromises that violate God’s Word. But this exception clause is not found in Scripture! The real test of the fabric of your Christian walk is whether you are willing to uphold the Scriptures when it is going to cut across the most sensitive of human emotions. If we are prepared to allow our emotions to lead us with our family problems, Satan will use it to his full advantage to damage God’s work.
- e. Matthew 10:37-38 *“He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.”*

B. The Compromisers (Vs. 11-12)

- 1. The enemy voices their threat in Vs. 11
- 2. Those living near the enemy become carriers of the propaganda (Vs. 12). The enemy filled their ears with tales of conquest.
- 3. The people who become launching pads for Satanic darts are those who have positioned themselves closest to the enemy and compromise. The worldly Christian is a ready tool for Satan.
- 4. “ten times” = this phrase is sometimes used in the O.T. as a figure of speech meaning many times instead of a literal number (Num. 14:27, Dan 1:20). Our figure of speech “umpteen times” would convey the thought. The thought conveyed is that wherever the people turned, the enemy would attack them.

III. The Prevailing over the Conspiracy (Vs. 9, 13-15)

A. Intercession (Vs. 9)

- 1. Prayerfulness (9a)
 - a. Prayer is not a last resort, it is a first resort and a powerful weapon against the enemy. Even in Nehemiah’s day where there was a physical component to the battle (actual fighting), the war was still primarily of a spiritual nature. David & Goliath another example of this (1 Samuel 17)
 - b. “our God” = they had a personal relationship with the Almighty
- 2. Watchfulness (9b)
 - a. We are to be alert and discerning of spiritual dangers
 - b. Christ exhorted the disciples to “watch and pray”

B. Fortification (Vs. 13)

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

1. Standing Firm (public stand)
 - a. Strategic places on the wall guarded.
 - b. A position of altitude on the wall would do two things: 1. It would help God's people see the enemy 2. It would help the enemy see God's people and be deterred
 - c. Nehemiah again positions people according to their families. We need to learn to see the connection between our collective stand as a body of believers and the safety and protection of our families.
2. Standing Armed (equipped)
 - a. Our weapons not carnal.
 - b. Ephesians 6 – believe is equipped of God for spiritual battle

C. Exhortation (Vs. 14)

The men the primary ones addressed (Vs. 14). The men are to take a lead in standing on the wall and fighting the enemy.

1. Don't Fear!
 - a. Fear a major component of the enemy's tactics
 - b. So often Scripture exhorts us to "fear not"
2. Have Faith!
 - a. The battle is the Lord's! (1. Samuel 17:47)
 - b. We are to focus on His might and power. God is described as 'great' and 'terrible' (same description as 1:5) 'terrible' means "one to be feared, revered"
3. Go Fight!
 - a. Fight for your brethren in the Lord
 - b. Fight for your family – sons, daughters, wives
 - c. Fight for your homes

D. Exertion (Vs. 15)

1. The enemy's plots were successfully foiled by the public stand of God's people.
2. The work was now able to resume. The battle is not an end in itself. The purpose for the fight is to maintain and continue the work of God
3. Contend for the faith so that you can then build yourself up on your most holy faith (Jude). Battle so that you might then build!

Conclusion:

1. Which side of the battle are you on? Will you take a stand?
2. Are we fighting the battle with spiritual weaponry or the weapons of the flesh?

Working & Warring (3)

Text: Nehemiah 4:16-23

Introduction:

1. Nehemiah teaches us many lessons concerning the art of Christian service. It also contains many principles of how to be a spiritual leader.
2. This chapter: The battle erupts as the walls are being built. In the Christian life have to learn to be servants & soldiers, builders & battlers, workers & warriors. **Both** are necessary.
3. In this chapter, we note the two waves of attack used by the enemy to try and stop the work of God: 1. Contempt 2. Conspiracy. The third wave of attack will come in Chapter 6 – Compromise
4. Having learned of the enemy's tactics, Nehemiah sets up a defense plan so they can continue in the work and at the same time, be in a position to resist the enemy. Note **“from that time forth”** in Vs. 16. They learned from their experiences to be better prepared and equipped for the future to face the enemy. Several key things were put in place:

I. The Arming of the People (Vs. 16-18)

A. The Involvement of Leadership (Vs. 16)

1. Nehemiah's Personal Retinue (16a)
 - a. These were Nehemiah's right-hand men (Vs. 23), his leadership team.
 - b. It is important that those in leadership take the initiative in the spiritual battle God's people find themselves in.
 - c. Leaders need to get their “hands dirty” in the work of the ministry but balance that with giving adequate time to keep watch for the enemy's movements
 - d. 'habergeons' = coats of mail, breastplates
2. The People's Rulers (16b)
 1. They were there to encourage the workers in their labors and provide leadership in the event of an attack
 2. As a worker, knowing that those in leadership are standing guard, would give you a sense of security and thus your hands would be strengthened for the work.

B. The Inclusion of Laymen (Vs. 17-19)

1. The Bearers (Vs. 17)
 - a. Their task was to remove the rubbish
 - b. There were those whose role was to load and others to carry.
2. The Builders (Vs. 18)
 - a. Involved with the actual construction on the wall.

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

- b. Their sword was hung at their side as their role demanded the use of both hands.
3. The picture of the **Sword & the Trowel**: Both speak of the ministry of the Word.
 - a. The trowel speaks of the ministry of the Word in edification, building up in the faith.
 - b. The sword speaks of the ministry of the Word in contention, defending the faith
 - c. The sword and trowel principle seen in Jude (Note Vs. 3 & 20)

II. The Alarm for the People (Vs. 18-20)

A. The Position of the Trumpet (Vs. 18)

1. 'trumpet' = the shofar trumpet made out of the horn of a ram or goat. It was used for giving signals for war as in the case of Joshua (6:10-16) and Gideon (Judges 7:18-22). PLAY SOUND
2. "by me" = Nehemiah was a master organizer and delegator, but he took personal ownership of this most important role of warning God's people. Note: Those given the oversight of the people of God must take this role seriously.
3. The example of Ezekiel: Ezekiel 3:17-18 *"Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: **therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me.** When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand."*
4. The example of Isaiah 58:1 *"Cry aloud, spare not, **lift up thy voice like a trumpet**, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins."* Note: It is interesting that of all the instruments God could have used to describe the ministry of preaching, he used the trumpet. Our denunciations of sin are not to be soft, smooth and compromising, but loud, distinct, clear and sharp.
5. 2 Timothy 4:2-4 *"Preach the word: be instant in season, out of season..."*

B. The Purpose of the Trumpet (Vs. 19-20a)

1. To alert (Vs. 19) and assemble (20a) the people
 - a. The trumpet blast would alert the people of God to which part of the wall was under attack from the enemy. They could then concentrate their forces at the point where the enemy was **currently** challenging. Imagine the enemy challenging at the Fish Gate and the watchman sounding at the Valley Gate!

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

- b. The enemy often attacks different parts of the wall at different times. Even in modern warfare, large sections of the war front often go through silent periods with little to know action.
2. Principle: God's men need to be watchful and discerning as to which part of the wall is under siege by the enemy right now and sound the warning so that God's people can "resist the devil" so that he will "flee from us".
3. Challenge: We seem to be very good at blowing the trumpet at places on the wall that are important but NOT under attack at the present. Luther: "If I profess with loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at the moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides, is merely flight and disgrace if he flinches at THAT point."
4. Challenge: We seem to be more concerned today with shooting at the man willing to blow the trumpet at the enemy's attempt to surmount the wall than uniting together to repel the enemy.

C. The Perspective of Faith (Vs. 20b)

1. With all their preparation and organization for battle, Nehemiah knew that the outcome of the battle would always be determined by the intervention of God's power. Nehemiah was a man of faith and had a God-centered approach to the battle.
2. David declared to Goliath "the battle is the LORD's" (1 Sam. 17:47)

III. The Alertness of the People (Vs. 21-23)

A. The Division of Labor (Vs. 21)

1. Half of Nehemiah's servants worked
2. Half of Nehemiah's servants watched
3. Commenced in dawn and ended in darkness

B. The Decision for Lodging (Vs. 22)

1. Workers were to sleep at night within the walls of Jerusalem for safety so they could benefit from the protection of guards which were a part of Nehemiah's leadership team (Vs. 23)
2. Godly leadership a protection for God's people. Important that you seek to have your family under the oversight of a local church and pastor.
3. Wiersbe: "Leaders are often awake when others are asleep, and working when others are resting."
4. Staying in the company of God's people would also help to overcome the problem of those living near the enemy becoming carriers of evil tidings (Vs. 12)

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

C. The Dedication of Leadership (Vs. 23)

1. Due to the dual responsibilities of Nehemiah and his team to labor in the day and watch at night, they didn't even have time to change their clothes.
2. This statement not made of anyone else. "He thus set a blessed example, in the circle of his own responsibility of personal devotedness."
3. Nehemiah did not require sacrifice of others without setting an example himself. They were willing to sacrifice personal comfort for the sake of God's work.
4. Illustration: Paul's "night and day" labors

Conclusion:

1. Which side of the battle are you on? Will you take a stand? Are you standing in unity with your brethren in the spiritual battle or are you an inside sympathizer that the enemy can use to accomplish his subversive work?
2. What is our attitude to the ministry of warning?

Selfishness Hinders Service

Text: Nehemiah 5:1-19

Introduction:

1. This chapter: The work of God is obstructed by internal problems. In the previous chapter there was opposition from without, now there is hindrance from within.
2. The work of the wall and its associated battles, did not create the problems. They simply revealed the problems that were already there below the surface. “When extra effort is put forth in the Lord’s work, sin problems (such as this greed) will be revealed; for stress always reveals where weakness is. Many church people appear to be fine church members until extra commitment is required. Then we discover where sin problems exist that were hitherto not evident among the members. Of course, some prefer not to see the sin problem but rather prefer to blame the extra work for the Lord as the problem. The devil loves to get us to blame God for the devil’s evil doing. So be careful that you do not become critical of the work at church and think that it is the problem when the real problem is the sin in the heart of the people who are causing problems in the church.” John Butler
3. The Christian has an enemy without (Satan & the world) but he also has an enemy within (self)
4. Selfishness and greed at the heart of the problem confronting Nehemiah in Chapter 5. “Selfishness means putting myself at the center of everything.” (Wiersbe)

I. The Exploitation of the People (Vs. 1-5)

A. Their Pain (Vs. 1)

1. “great cry” = public outcry
2. “people and their wives” = included the wives. Wives were feeling the pressure due to their husband’s commitment to the work
3. “their brethren the Jews” = the source of their pain and grief. Identified in Vs. 7 as the ‘nobles’ and ‘rulers’. The source of the problem were the people who had money and position!

B. Their Problems (Vs. 2-5)

1. Their borrowing (Vs. 2-4)
 - a. For food (Vs. 2-3)
 - b. For taxation (Vs. 4)
 - c. Vs. 11 indicates the rate of interest that was being charged – “the hundredth part” which would amount to 1%. Charged on a monthly basis, this would be 12% per annum.
 - d. The workers were not remunerated for their labors on the wall. Much sacrifice had to be made to serve as they had to leave their regular occupations as tradesmen, craftsmen, laborers and farmers for the duration of the project.

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

- e. Note: In times of intense spiritual labor & its associated battles, there are those who seek to use the situation to their personal advantage rather than making a sacrifice themselves.
- 2. Their bondage (Vs. 5)
 - a. Sons and daughters enslaved
 - b. Lands and livelihood taken

II. The Exposure of the Perpetrators (Vs. 6-13)

A. There was Righteous Anger (Vs. 6-7a)

- 1. His anger was from a right motive (6)
 - a. Anger is a right response to evil. Nehemiah's anger is not due to selfish motives. He is vexed over the grievous damage being cause the people of God through the selfishness and greed of wicked rulers.
 - b. Illustrations: Christ's anger at those who used the temple as a place of commerce and Moses' breaking of the two tables of the law (Ex. 32)
- 2. His anger was measured (7a)
 - a. Nehemiah was in control of his emotions, not the other way around.
 - b. Nehemiah didn't act on impulse. He paused to gain his composure and give a thoughtful response. Prov. 16:32 *"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."*
 - c. Nehemiah was angry at evil enough to act! Our problem today is that we are often so passive towards sin in the camp we get angry at those who dare to get angry at the sin!!!

B. There was Rebuke (Vs. 7-10)

- 1. The place of rebuke (Vs. 7)
 - a. "a great assembly" = the congregation of the people of God. Nehemiah confronted their sin publicly.
 - b. Some things need to be resolved on a one on one basis (Matthew 18) but public sins are to attract a public censure.
 - c. 1 Tim. 5:20 *"Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear."*
 - d. 1 Cor. 5:4 *"...when ye are gathered together"*
- 2. The points of the rebuke (Vs. 7-10)
 - a. He appealed to the Scriptures (Vs. 7)
 - i. The actions of these men were a direct violation of the O.T. commandments. Selfishness will cause you to trample the Word of God under feet.
 - ii. Deuteronomy 23:19-20 *"Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of*

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

anything that is lent upon usury: Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to in the land whither thou goest to possess it.” See also Leviticus 25:35-43

- b. He appealed to his personal example (Vs. 8, 10)
 - i. Nehemiah and his team had sacrificed to redeem Jews in slavery to the heathen. While Nehemiah was seeking to free the brethren, they were enslaving them for personal gain! (Vs. 8)
 - ii. Nehemiah could have used his position to legitimately tax the people but he chose not to.
- c. He appealed to their testimony (Vs. 9)
 - i. “fear of God” = a powerful regulator of behavior. “...by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil.” (Prov. 16:6)
 - ii. “reproach of the heathen” = if they had feared the LORD, they would have been more concerned about their testimony before the heathen. How often the Name of Christ has been brought into disrepute due to Christians mishandling finances!

C. There was to be Restitution (Vs. 11-13)

- 1. The timing of the restoration - immediately (Vs. 11a)
- 2. The extent of the restoration (11b)
- 3. The commitment to restoration (Vs. 12)
- 4. The warning to reinforce restoration (Vs. 13)

D. There was Rejoicing (13b)

- 1. The people respond ‘Amen’ which means they gave their assent and approval to the course of action prescribed by Nehemiah
- 2. The people’s cry of anguish turned into an anthem of praise.

III. The Example of the Person in Charge (Vs. 15-19)

In contrast to the nobles, Nehemiah was a truly selfless leader.

A. The manifestation of his selflessness (14-18)

- 1. He did not take advantage of his position (Vs. 14-15)
 - a. “bread of the governor” = the lawful food allowance allocated by Persian officials and financed through taxation of the local community
 - b. He didn’t exact what was his rightful due (Vs. 14). Nehemiah did not put his personal rights ahead of the needs of others. Remember joy is Jesus first, others second, yourself last!
 - c. This stood in contrast to former governors where even their servants ruled in a harsh and cruel manner (Vs. 15)
- 2. He involved himself in the work (Vs. 16)

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

- a. Nehemiah and his men set a good example and worked alongside the common people.
- b. They did not make financial gain their goal.
3. He was generous and hospitable to others (Vs. 17-18)
 - a. Some estimate this amount of food would feed over 500 guests.
 - b. One very simple yet important part of our giving is to open our table to the brethren.

B. The motivation of his selflessness (15b, 18b, 19)

1. A reverence for God (15b)
 - a. Nehemiah's vertical attitude towards God regulated his horizontal actions towards men.
 - b. The fear of the Lord is a powerful antidote to sin.
 - c. "The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God, you fear everything else." (Oswald Chambers)
2. A compassion for God's people (18b)
 - a. Nehemiah was not detached from the sufferings and burdens of the people. He had a tender heart to the needs of those God had called him to lead.
 - b. 'compassion' = A suffering with another; painful sympathy; a sensation of sorrow excited by the distress or misfortunes of another; pity.
3. A desire for God's approval (19)
 - a. Nehemiah's close walk with God again highlighted. He was a truly spiritual leader.
 - b. Nehemiah's first concern was to have the approval of God and that made him a good leader of men.

Conclusion: Are we living for self or for others? What is our attitude towards finances? Is it one that reflects a biblical mindset and heart or that of the world?

Selfless Leadership

Text: Nehemiah 5:14-19

Introduction:

1. This chapter: The work of God is obstructed by internal problems. In the previous chapter there was opposition from without, now there is hindrance from within.
2. The work of the wall and its associated battles, did not create the problems. They simply revealed the problems that were already there below the surface. "When extra effort is put forth in the Lord's work, sin problems (such as this greed) will be revealed; for stress always reveals where weakness is. Many church people appear to be fine church members until extra commitment is required. Then we discover where sin problems exist that were hitherto not evident among the members. Of course, some prefer not to see the sin problem but rather prefer to blame the extra work for the Lord as the problem. The devil loves to get us to blame God for the devil's evil doing. So be careful that you do not become critical of the work at church and think that it is the problem when the real problem is the sin in the heart of the people who are causing problems in the church." John Butler
3. Like Paul, Nehemiah is placed in a position where he has to turn the spotlight on his own godly leadership credentials which stood in contrast to the selfish rulers of his day.
4. Review of previous lesson:

I. The Exploitation of the People (Vs. 1-5)

II. The Exposure of the Perpetrators (Vs. 6-13)

III. The Example of the Person in Charge (Vs. 15-19)

A. Selfless Leadership (Vs. 14-15)

1. He did not take advantage of his position (Vs. 14-15)
2. "bread of the governor" = the lawful food allowance allocated by Persian officials and financed through taxation of the local community
3. He didn't exact what was his rightful due (Vs. 14). Nehemiah did not put his personal rights ahead of the needs of others. Remember joy is Jesus first, others second, yourself last!
4. The work of God is such that we will need to learn to die to our rights
5. "A cross stands in the way of spiritual leadership, a cross upon which the leader must consent to be impaled." J. Oswald Sanders
6. This stood in contrast to former governors where even their servants ruled in a harsh and cruel manner (Vs. 15)

B. Servant Leadership (Vs. 16)

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

1. Nehemiah and his men set a good example and worked alongside the common people. He did not require others to do what he wasn't willing to do himself.
2. Luke 22:24-26 *"And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve."*
3. Nehemiah and his men did get distracted from the work by pursuing business opportunities.
4. Note: Pursuit of material gain by a man of God can cause terrible damage to the work of God. The call of God to ministry often means relinquishing the prospects of making significant sums of money.

C. Sacrificial Leadership (Vs. 17-18)

1. He was generous and hospitable to others (17-18a)
 - a. Some estimate this amount of food would feed over 500 guests. One very simple yet important part of our giving is to open our table to the brethren. 1 Peter 4:9 *"Use hospitality one to another without grudging."*
 - b. It is easy to be generous with other people's money but not our own!
 - c. 1 Timothy 6:17-19 *"Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."*
2. He was compassionate towards God's people (18b)
 - a. Nehemiah was not detached from the sufferings and burdens of the people. He had a tender heart to the needs of those God had called him to lead.
 - b. 'compassion' = A suffering with another; painful sympathy; a sensation of sorrow excited by the distress or misfortunes of another; pity.

D. Spiritual Leadership (Vs. 19)

3. A reverence for God (15b)
 - a. Nehemiah's vertical attitude towards God regulated his horizontal actions towards men.
 - b. The fear of the Lord is a powerful antidote to sin. Prov. 16:6 *"By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil."*

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

- c. “The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God, you fear everything else.” (Oswald Chambers)
- 4. A desire for God’s approval (19)
 - a. Nehemiah’s close walk with God again highlighted. He was a truly spiritual leader.
 - b. Nehemiah’s first concern was to have the approval of God and that made him a good leader of men.

Conclusion: Are we living for self or for others? What is our attitude towards finances/temporal things? Is it one that reflects a biblical mindset and heart or that of the world?

The Danger of Compromise

Text: Nehemiah 6:1-9

Introduction:

1. This chapter: The opposition from the enemy resumes but in a more subtle and dangerous form. Having failed to stop the progress of the work of God through open, frontal attack, the enemy now resorts to an under-cover operation to disrupt the work of God.
2. The enemy tries every crafty tactic he can come up with to get Nehemiah to compromise.
3. 'compromise' = an amicable agreement between parties in controversy, to settle their differences by mutual concessions.
4. The enemy uses four weapons against Nehemiah to try and get him to compromise: 1. The Lure of **Friendship** 2. The Lips of **Falsehood** 3. The Leadership of **Fear** 4. The Links of **Family**

I. The Lure of Friendship (Vs. 1-4)

A. The Enemies Proposal (Vs. 1-2)

1. The prompting of the proposal (Vs. 1).
 - a. Progress in the work of God will always arouse the interest and attention of the enemy.
 - b. The breaches were being repaired. Breaches were gaps or holes in the wall that had been punched through by enemy battering rams. Word is translated 'gap' in Ez. 22:30. The compromised Christian who has multiple cracks and weak points in his spiritual fortifications does not bother the enemy. But let him take steps to close those gaps of compromise and the wrath and fury of the enemy will be aroused.
 - c. The gates were soon to be hung.
2. The presentation of the proposal (Vs. 2)
 - a. Deceptive – appeared to be the extending of the hands of cooperation.
 - b. Dangerous – the real intent of the enemy was destruction. If the leader could be eliminated, the work of God and the people of God would be easy pickings for the enemy.
 - i. Ono = located approx. 40 km North-west of Jerusalem in hostile enemy territory.
 - ii. The invitation, now matter how nice on the surface, would require Nehemiah to leave the place of safety and victory.

B. Nehemiah's Refusal (Vs. 3-4)

Learn to say **NO** to invitations that lead to compromise!

1. Nehemiah's Perspective (3a)

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

- a. Nehemiah held the work of God in high regard.
 - b. The work they were doing was indeed of great historical and spiritual importance for the nation of Israel. Close to 150 years have elapsed since the walls were destroyed by the Babylonians.
2. Nehemiah's Priorities (3b)
- a. Nehemiah was absolute – "I **cannot** come down"
 - b. Nehemiah left no room for further negotiation or dialogue. To him it wasn't even an option. His allegiance to God and His work made it impossible for him to accept such an invitation
 - c. Nehemiah knew that his absence would mean the demise of the work
3. Nehemiah's Position (3c)
- a. To accept this invitation would require Nehemiah to "come down"
 - b. Accepting an invitation to compromise is always a step down from the high ground of faith.
4. Nehemiah's Persistence (Vs. 4)
- a. Nehemiah demonstrated more persistence than the enemy. The enemy came a further four times and Nehemiah gave them the same answer every time.
 - b. The enemy does not give up at the first refusal! Many stand for the truth initially, only to eventually buckle to the enemy's pressure.
 - c. What about love and grace?
 - i. John 14:15 "If ye love me, keep my commandments."
 - ii. Titus 2:11-12 "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;"
 - iii. Ernest Pickering:

One young man who had been for years a member of a fundamentalist church suddenly left it to join a New Evangelical congregation. Upon enquiring as to the reason, the pastor was told that the New Evangelicals were more loving than the fundamentalists and that the young man was attracted to them for this reason. None of us can claim a corner on love, and no doubt it is true that many fundamentalist congregations could greatly improve in their love toward the Lord, toward one another, and toward the world in which they live. However, what some perceive of as love is, in reality, compromise. Many confuse a broad acceptance of various doctrinal positions, lifestyles, musical tastes, and methodologies as a demonstration of Christian love. In other words, if one is broader and more lenient, one is more loving. But this concept is not grounded in Scripture. Truth and love are not to be divorced. They walk together and are in perfect agreement. Some believe that if one is truly loving, one will not denounce error nor evaluate in a negative way the positions of others. Since the New Evangelicals do not do this, they are perceived to be more loving than fundamentalists, to be kinder, more gracious, and more tolerant. But divine love is capable of hatred, strange as that may seem. "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil." (Psalm 97:10). We are to "love in the truth" (2 John 1). One who is truly filled with divine love will rebuke evil and expose error. Many have erroneously equated a refusal to speak forthrightly as a demonstration of love.

- d. Note: If Christ were to preach in many of our churches today, He

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

would likely be thrown out for not being Christ-like enough, for not being loving and gracious enough! We should note Christ's true perspective on error in Rev. 2:14-16 where He rebukes the church at Pergamos for their slackness in dealing with false doctrine in their midst.

II. The Lips of Falsehood (Vs. 5-9)

A. The Report (Vs. 5-7)

1. The format of the report (Vs. 5)
 - a. An open letter. Intended to be read and spread!
 - b. Letters are powerful tools, for good or evil.
2. The contents of the report (Vs. 6-7a)
 - a. Hearsay – gossip and idle tales. How often do Christians make conclusions based on “I heard such and such from so and so” Some Christians are Gossip Garbage trucks – they go from one house to another, collecting wheelie bins full of slander and gossip! Prov. 18:8; 26:22 – Words of talebearers are as wounds.
 - b. Slander – false accusation. In our day, the culture has become such that if you simply make up enough ugly sounding stories about someone's character, it almost gets treated like evidence in itself.
 - i. Falsely accused them of planning to rebel against the king. Note: It is interesting how often the people who want to charge a godly leader with wrongdoing are rebels themselves!
 - ii. Falsely accused Nehemiah of selfish ambition for power
 - iii. Falsely accused Nehemiah of self-promotion
 - iv. John Butler

Those who rebel against the will of God are generally and ironically the first to charge others with rebellion of one sort or another when the accusers do not like the way others are acting. The Jews' enemies had been rebelling against the king's orders about the walls ever since Nehemiah came to Jerusalem, yet they make this charge of rebellion against Nehemiah. This hypocritical habit of sinners in charging others with the sins they themselves are guilty of is also seen in the charge of lack of love often made against pastors and other church leaders. The ones who lack love the most are generally the first to charge others with lack of love. Check out the lives of those making absurd charges, and you will likely find it is a hypocrite pointing the finger.

- c. Threats – this slander had strong political overtones. To rebel against the king of Babylon was a most serious offense, punishable by death.
3. The aim of the report
 - a. They wanted to force Nehemiah off the wall to come and discuss the accusations against him. But falsehood, slander and hear say are not basis for any meeting!

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

- b. They wanted to cause fear, thus weakening the resolve of the builders so that the work would stop (Vs. 9)

B. The Response (Vs. 8-9)

1. Nehemiah stayed on the wall (Vs. 8) – We are not to leave the work of God to chase every slanderous rumor we hear!
2. Nehemiah exposed the lies (Vs. 8) – Nehemiah did not directly address the specifics of the accusation. He simply called them out for what they were – lies!
3. Nehemiah sought the Lord (Vs. 9) – Take slander and false accusation to the Lord and seek His strength to press on with service God.

Conclusion: Are you a supporter or detractor of God's work? Are you responding in a spiritual manner to spiritual attacks?

The Danger of Compromise (2)

Text: Nehemiah 6:10-19

Introduction:

1. 'compromise' = an amicable agreement between parties in controversy, to settle their differences by mutual concessions. Note: Some compromises/concessions are needed (e.g. in family or work life). However, the truth is never to be compromised. Introductory remarks to Ernest Pickering's book, "The Tragedy of Compromise" are insightful:

There are times when compromise may be wise and good. In the everyday interaction of life, there are times when individuals or groups must come from more extreme positions to a middle ground. Husbands and wives must sometimes yield to one another. Committees striving to solve problems and establish goals must agree to common terms. Persons of goodwill learn to surrender personal preferences to achieve a mutually agreeable solution. This kind of compromise is right and good and promotes a more harmonious relationship between human beings. In other words, not all compromise is evil. On the other hand, there are certain truths, convictions, and positions which cannot be compromised. Martin Luther, pressed by his political and ecclesiastical foes, rightly refused to renounce his writings and said to his opponents, "Here I stand; I can do no other." Athanasius, champion of the complete deity of Christ against the Arians who denied it, was warned by a colleague, "The whole world is against you." Replied Athanasius, "Then I am against the whole world." There would be no compromise for him on a matter so crucial.

2. The enemy uses four weapons against Nehemiah to try and get him to compromise. Review of last week's points: 1. The Lure of **Friendship** 2. The Lips of **Falsehood**

Tonight, we look at the final two weapons: 1. The Leadership of **Fear** 2. The Links of **Family**

I. The Leadership of Fear (Vs. 10-14)

A. The Promoting of Fear (Vs. 10)

1. The prophet Shemaiah (Vs. 10)
 - a. A deceptive presentation (Vs. 10)
 - i. The person: Shemaiah was one of the spiritual leaders in Israel. He appears to have access to the temple (Vs. 10) and he makes a 'prophecy' (Vs. 12). He was likely a priest. It is hard to stand against those who claim to be spiritual leaders.
 - ii. Illustration: The old prophet and the young man of God – "I am a prophet also as thou art" (1 Kings 13:18)
 - iii. The play act: Shemaiah feigned fear by shutting himself up in his home
 - b. An insidious plan (Vs. 10, 13)

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

- i. The ploy was to try and get Nehemiah to act upon an emotional impulse rather than being governed by objective truth. This would give them occasion to ‘reproach’ him. ‘reproach’ means “to expose by stripping, defame.”
- ii. The “just follow your heart/feelings” mantra is an extremely dangerous philosophy for decision making.
- iii. Hitler: “Mental confusion, contradiction of feeling, indecisiveness, panic; these are our weapons.” Fear is one of the chief weapons of Satan.
- iv. Note: If we allow our natural drive for self-preservation to dictate our choices, sooner or later, we will compromise on the truth.

B. The Prevailing over Fear (Vs. 11-14)

1. Nehemiah’s Refusal (Vs. 11)

- a. Nehemiah was courageous (11a) – Nehemiah was a man of spiritual steel. He faced the winds of adversity head on and didn’t run away in panic like many do today. Prov. 28:1 *“The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion.”*
- b. Nehemiah was humble (11b) – Though he had a high position in the land, he did not have an inflated opinion of himself. He might have been the king’s cupbearer, but he was not a priest and he would not presume to enter a place that was forbidden him.
- c. Nehemiah was Scriptural (11c)
 - i. Nehemiah knew the recommended course of action was not from God as it required him to violate the Word of God. He did not succumb to “situation ethics”
 - ii. We need to run our decisions through the filter of God’s Word, asking ourselves the question *“What saith the Scripture?”* (Rom. 4:3) Our rule for life is *“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good”* (1 Thess. 5:21)
 - iii. Only the priests were authorized to enter the holy place in the temple (Num. 3:10). Uzziah is an example of a king who violated this and was judged by God (2 Chr. 26:16-21)

2. Nehemiah’s Discernment (Vs. 12-13)

- a. Nehemiah’s perceptions were not carnal but spiritual. Nehemiah was a man of prayer and of the Word, hence his godly discernment. Nehemiah cut through the deceptive façade and saw the real intent of the enemy. He smelt a rat!
- b. He discerned several things:
 - i. His commission was not from God
 - ii. His motivation was selfish

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

- iii. His intention was harmful - The intent was to trip Nehemiah up so they could have occasion for an evil report. Previously they had manufactured their own false reports. Now they sought to lead Nehemiah into a trap that would allow them to have something with a little more weight to use against him.
 - iv. Illustration: The Pharisees and Sadducees tried repeatedly to trip up the Saviour in a similar way
3. Nehemiah's Prayer (Vs. 14)
- a. Nehemiah sets down a good example for us as we are faced with similar trials and tests. His most important response in the face of all these things is prayer!
 - b. Nehemiah simply asks the Lord to look upon the situation. Effectively He places the issue before the Lord, trusting that He will respond with perfect justice.

II. The Links of Family (Vs. 15-19)

A. The Success of the work (Vs. 15-16b)

- 1. The speed of the completion – 52 days! This is a testament to the diligence and dedication of those involved in the work.
- 2. The secret of the completion – God was behind this project! In any work of God there are two aspects: 1. The Divine 2. The Human. The reason this work was blessed of God was because it was initiated by God and empowered by God (A. Redpath).

B. The Sadness towards the work (Vs. 16a)

- 1. The enemies perspective – they were saddened at the success of the work of God! There are those that rejoice to hear of damage to good churches and who are secretly distressed when it succeeds.
- 2. The enemies perception – despite their hatred for the work of God, in the end, even the hard-hearted opponents of the work had to recognize that this was not a work that could only be explained in human terms. God was behind the success of this work!

C. The Subversion of the work (Vs. 17-19)

- 1. Marriages (Vs. 18)
 - a. Sympathisers within who cooperate with the enemy cause much damage to the work of God!
 - b. Tobiah had a close relationship with Judah through his wife and daughter in law (6:18-19). Marriages of this kind with the heathen were forbidden by God. "The ties of marriage were stronger than their bonds of commitment to the Lord" (Wiersbe)
 - c. Butler: "Some of Nehemiah's worst problems from within the camp came from people involved with bad marriages. Unsanctified marriages are always a pain in the neck to the work of God. We have personally found in our over forty years of ministry that those who are problems (the murmurers,

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

complainers, dissidents, discouragers etc...) in the church frequently have marriage problems. In fact, marriage problems are almost always present with troublemakers in the church. Either the marriage is a forbidden one (such as a saved person marrying an unsaved person or a divorced person remarrying), or the marriage does not follow Biblical guidelines (such as the wife wears the pants and is the dominate one in the marriage and not the husband).

- d. A. Redpath: "There are plenty of men in any church who know the right thing, but who often are afraid of petticoat government."
 - e. Note: A laid back personality is no excuse for a lack of leadership. You do not have to be laid back and relaxed when it comes to the Word of God!
 - f. Warning! We have a tendency to invoke the "its family" exception clause in order to make compromises that violate God's Word. But this exception clause is not found in Scripture! The real test of the fabric of your Christian walk is whether you are willing to uphold the Scriptures when it is going to cut across the most sensitive of human emotions. If we are prepared to allow our emotions to lead us with our family problems rather than the truth, sooner or later, Satan will exploit that weakness to his advantage and damage the work of God.
 - g. Matthew 10:37-38 *"He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me."*
2. Messages (Vs. 17, 19)
- a. Written communication – subversive letters
 - b. Verbal communication – they represented God's man negatively and the rebels favorably!
 - c. Butler: "Every pastor and other Christian leader who has been serving God for any length of time knows Nehemiah's experience here. It is a very disgusting experience to say the least. Those people who oppose your work and continually work behind your back to disrupt and hinder your work are the ones others in the church praise to you. The praisers' theme seems to be, "How wonderful are the dissidents." But the Bible says, "They that forsake the law praise the wicked" (Prov. 28:4), so you know that those who praise the wicked to you are not good people themselves."

Conclusion: Are you a helper or harmer of God's work? Are you taking a stand for God where it costs you?

Maintaining Spiritual Strength

Text: Nehemiah 7:1-73

Introduction:

1. The walls have been completed (6:15) but the work is not over! Steps must be taken to maintain and build upon the victories won.
2. The first section of the Book primarily had to do with the rebuilding of the walls (Chapter 1-6). Now the focus is upon reviving the people (Chapter 7-13)

I. The Appointment of Rulers (Vs. 1-3)

A. Their Credentials (Vs. 2)

1. Hanani
 - a. A brother of Nehemiah
 - b. A man whose spiritual caliber is highlighted in chapter 1 in his concern for the condition of Jerusalem
2. Hananiah
 - a. A responsible man – “ruler of the palace”
 - i. ‘palace’ = likely the temple fortress/castle located north of the temple
 - ii. He was obviously a man who had proved himself in his sphere of responsibility, thus qualifying him for the privilege of greater responsibility. Faithfulness in the small things is what prepares and qualifies us for the bigger things. Illustration: David
 - b. A faithful man
 - i. He was trustworthy and reliable.
 - ii. Faithful men are rare! Prov. 20:6 *“Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?”*
 - iii. Unfaithful men are an injury! Prov. 25:19 *“Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint.”*
 - iv. Faithful men are blessed! Prov. 28:20 *“A faithful man shall abound with blessings.”*
 - c. A godly man
 - i. The secret behind his faithfulness. He was a man possessed of awe, reverence and respect for His God.
 - ii. His reverence for God is said to be “above many” revealing that amongst God’s people, there are varying degrees of the fear of God.
3. Summary: With both of these men, we can clearly see that they were appointed to places of leadership on the basis of their spiritual qualifications.

B. Their Charge (Vs. 1, 3)

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

1. Porters (gatekeepers) had been assigned to the oversight of the gates (Vs. 1)
2. These men were responsible to oversee two main things:
 - a. The operation of the gates
 - i. The gates were not to be opened until dawn had passed. The grey of early dawn presented a time of vulnerability to incursion by the enemy.
 - ii. The gates were to be carefully watched during the closing up process for two reasons: 1. In case an enemy slipped past 2. In case the gates were not properly shut
 - iii. Principle: As believers, we need to learn to be on the alert for potential points of weakness in our lives where the enemy might get a foothold, and prayerfully preempt the enemy with wise decisions.
 - iv. Butler: “The rules given here especially emphasize caution...There are times when evil is especially strong – such as when our circumstances strengthen temptations and when evil is accepted and encouraged by nearly everyone. In such times we need to take extra caution against evil lest it overcome us. Extra caution is not appreciated by most people, however. They are likely to view extra caution as being too strict and too legalistic. But the fact that so many are falling so quickly to evil today, even among Christian ranks, justifies taking the extra caution even if it seems too strict and too legalistic to some.”
 - v. Note: Carelessness rather than caution seems to be the prevailing attitude amongst believers today
 - b. The watching of the city
 - i. Particularly important at night after the sun has gone down and the gates have been shut. Much evil transpires during the night seasons.
 - ii. Note: The presence of the walls did not mean the people of God could relax in their vigilance towards the enemy. The presence of godly standards of doctrine and separation in my life do not automatically make me immune from the enemy! Many a soldier has fallen due to such an attitude of complacency.
 - iii. The watchmen were apportioned watch care of the part of the city where their homes were located. “Nehemiah understood that the strength and security of the city depended on the spiritual condition of its individual households. If the enemies gained a foothold there, it meant danger for the future of the city as a whole”

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

(Lacey) If we leave the doors open to the enemy at home, you endanger the rest of God's people! Sadly today, most Christian men are asleep and don't want to be woken up either! They sleep while Satan rocks their cradle.

II. The Assembling of the Remnant (Vs. 4-5)

A. Nehemiah's Dilemma (Vs. 4)

1. The city was sparsely populated
2. The city was still largely in ruins
3. There is safety in the people of God being in "one accord and one place" So long as the people of God remained scattered without the walls, they would be vulnerable to the enemy. An isolated Christian experience is not the will of God.
4. Hebrews 10:24-25 *"And let us **consider one another** to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking **the assembling of ourselves together**, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."*

B. Nehemiah's Desire (Vs. 5)

1. The prompting of the desire – God put it on his heart
 - a. "my God" = highlights Nehemiah's close relationship with God.
 - b. A man who walks with God is the man God will use to accomplish His plan. Nehemiah was a channel through which God could work.
 - c. Note: If you have a leader who is in touch with God, follow him as he follows God.
2. The providential aiding of the desire
 - a. The discovery of the register was Providential confirmation that Nehemiah's burden was of God.
 - b. This teaches us something on how the will of God is discerned. There is the burden God lays on the heart followed by the open doors of God's providence.

III. The Assessment of the Records (Vs. 6-73)

A. Record of the Saints (Vs. 6-67) (S. Ezra 2)

1. Leaders (Vs. 6-7)
2. Families (Vs. 8-25)
3. Towns (Vs. 26-38)
4. Priests (Vs. 39-42)
5. Levites (Vs. 43)
6. Singers (Vs. 44) There are at least 17 references to singers and singing in the Book of Nehemiah
7. Porters (Vs. 45)
8. Nethinims (Vs. 46-56) 'Nethinim' = those given. They were given to the Levites to assist them in the service of the tabernacle.

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

9. Servants of Solomon (Vs. 57-60)
10. Non-certified people (Vs. 61-65)
 - a. God's standards for the priesthood were not to be compromised.
 - b. These men were purged out from serving as priests due to their disqualification
11. Totals (Vs. 66-67): 42,360 + 7,337 (servants) + 254 (singing men & women) = 49,951

B. Record of the Supplies (Vs. 68-69)

1. Horses: 736
2. Mules: 245
3. Camels: 435
4. Asses: 6,720

C. Record of the Sacrifices (Vs. 70-73)

1. God takes note of the giving of his saints. Even a cup of cold water given for the Lord is noted for reward in heaven (Matt. 10:42)
2. Giving of the leadership (Vs. 70-71)
 - a. dram' = a coin. Word of Persian origin.
 - b. 'some' = not all gave!
 - c. 'Tirshatha' = the governor (Zerubbabel)
3. Giving of the laymen (Vs. 72)
4. Principles to learn from their giving
 - a. They "offered freely" (Ezra 2:68)
 - i. 2 Cor. 9:7 *"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver."*
 - ii. 1 Chr. 29:9 *"Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the LORD: and David the king also rejoiced with great joy."*
 - iii. "freewill offerings" mentioned 26 times in the Old Testament
 - b. They gave "after their ability" (Ezra 2:69)
 - i. 1 Cor 16:2 *"Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come."*
 - ii. Their giving was both to the work of God in general (gold) and also to specific needs within the work of God (the priests garments)
5. Maxim: God's work is funded through the freewill tithes and offerings of God's people.

Conclusion: Are we being watchful in our Christian walk? Are we supporting the work of God sacrificially? LAUNCH OF NEHEMIAH FUND

Bible Revival (1)

Text: Nehemiah 8:1-6

Introduction:

1. Nehemiah 1-7 (Rebuilding the Walls); 8-13 (Reviving the People)
2. Illustration: Imagine if preacher started sermon at 10:30am on Sunday morning and didn't finish until 4:30pm in the afternoon.
3. Chapter 8-10 document a period of spiritual revival in the nation of Israel.
4. Word of God is a central element in true spiritual revival – e.g. Discovery of the Book in Josiah's reign (2 Kings 22:8); Reformation period; Revivals of 18th century
5. We will note 6 aspects of this back to the Bible movement across 2 lessons:

I. The Request for the Book (Vs. 1-2)

A. Their Assembling for the Word (Vs. 1)

1. The location: Water Gate
 - a. Water a symbol of the Word (Eph. 5:26; John 15:3)
 - b. Water a symbol of the Spirit (John 7:38-39)
 - c. Note: The only gate where nothing is recorded about it having been built or repaired. Speaks of the perfectness and indestructibility of the Word of God.
2. The unity: As one man
 1. Note the phrase “all the people” reoccurring throughout the chapter (Vs. 1, 3, 5, 6, 9, 11, 12, & 13)
 2. They were in “one accord and one place”. This desire for the Word of God was a desire shared by the whole congregation.
 3. Psalm 133:1 *“Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”*

B. Their Appetite for the Word (Vs. 1-3)

1. The Thirst in the people (Vs. 1)
 - a. Request for the reading of the law came from the people
 - b. Bring the Book! When you get up in the morning; bring the Book; when you go to bed at night, bring the Book; when you gather for family meal time, bring the Book; when your on break at work, bring the Book; when your driving in the car, bring the Book; when you come to church, bring the Book; read the Book; meditate on the Book; memorize the Book; study the Book; saturate your life in the Book; Bring the Book!
 - c. Butler: “The dearth in our churches of good pulpit ministries is not only the fault of deficient pastors but also the fault of congregations that have not been interested in the Word and are now getting their wish which is a form of judgment from God.”

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD.” (Amos 8:11)

2. The Teacher for the people (Vs. 2)
 - a. Ezra had arrived about 14 years prior to Nehemiah
 - b. Ezra 7 describes the spiritual credentials of this man – *“For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.”* (Vs. 10)
 - c. N.T. pastors & teachers are God’s gift to the body (Eph. 4:11-12)

II. The Receptivity to the Word (Vs. 3)

A. The Amount of Teaching (Vs. 3a)

1. Started early in the morning (lit. “from the light”) and finished at midday. Approx. 6 hours! Rebuke to short sermon lovers!
2. Illustration: Hunger for the Word in persecuted & third world countries
3. Whole families present – men, women and children

B. Their Attentiveness to the Teaching (Vs. 3b)

1. “ears were attentive unto the book of the law” = lit. means “their ears were unto the law” They were listening carefully and eagerly to God’s Word as it was read and taught. They were hanging on every Word!
2. Their focus was upon the Word of God primarily, not the man.
3. 1 Thess. 2:13 *“For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.”*
4. Challenge: When the Book is opened, are our ears open and attentive? How do we approach the preaching of God’s Word?
 - a. Do we hold the Word of God in such high esteem that we have a spirit of reverence when it is opened?
 - b. Do we receive the Word as coming straight from God or have we made the preacher our focus?
 - c. Do we come to church when God’s people are assembled to hear the Book?
 - d. When the preaching is taking place, how do approach it? E.G. body language, presence in the room, distractions (phones, each other)

III. The Reverence for the Book (Vs. 4-6)

A. The Position of the Book (Vs. 4)

1. Ezra stood on a raised platform above the people. ‘pulpit’ comes from same word translated ‘tower’ in Neh. 3:1, 25, 26 & 27. The

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

clear purpose of this structure was to facilitate the declaration of the Word.

2. Note: The way we structure our church auditoriums often conveys our emphasis.
3. This was not to exalt Ezra but for the purpose of good sight and sound
4. Psalm 138:2 *“I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for **thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.**”*
5. Leaders of Israel stood alongside Ezra (6 men on his right and 7 on his left) Their standing with Nehemiah demonstrated their support of the Word of God. Note: So long as your preacher is reading and teaching from the Book, stand with him!

B. The Posture of the people (Vs. 5)

1. Respect for the Word of God conveyed in their body language.
2. Note: The way we dress and carry ourselves in church important

C. The Preparation for the Book (Vs. 6)

1. Ezra offers a prayer of thanksgiving to God
2. The people respond with “Amen, Amen” indicating they agreed with what was prayed
3. The people bow down and worship the LORD with their faces to the ground.
4. This was heart preparation – thanksgiving to God for the Word and humble worship.

Conclusion:

1. How is our spiritual appetite for the Word of God?
2. What is our mindset when we come to church?
3. What is our attitude to the public reading and preaching of God’s Word?

Bible Revival (2)

Text: Nehemiah 8:7-18

Introduction:

1. Nehemiah 1-7 (Rebuilding the Walls); 8-13 (Reviving the People)
2. Chapter 8-10 document a period of spiritual revival in the nation of Israel.
3. Word of God is a central element in true spiritual revival – e.g. Discovery of the Book in Josiah's reign (2 Kings 22:8); Reformation period; Revivals of 18th century
4. Review previous lesson: 1 Request for the Book (Vs. 1-2) 2. Receptivity to the Book (Vs. 3) 3. Reverence for the Book (Vs. 4-6)

I. The Revealing of the Book (Vs. 7-8)

A. The Teaching People (Vs. 7)

1. 13 men plus others assisted Ezra in the teaching of this vast congregation
2. Appears these men may have moved amongst the congregation to help the people understand the Word
3. Eph. 4:11-12 *“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”*

B. The Teaching Process (Vs. 8)

1. The Enunciation of the Word – they read it ‘distinctly’ which means with clearness and clarity. Don’t rush the reading of God’s Word! He may or may not bless your comments on the Word but He will always bless His own Word.
2. The Exposition of the Word – they explained it so that the people could understand it
 - a. 1 Timothy 4:13 *“Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.”*
 - b. 2 Timothy 4:1-4 *“I charge thee before God...”*
 - c. Titus 2:15 *“These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.”*
3. This type of preaching means the preacher is governed by the text. As preachers our job is not to fill our sermons with our ideas, opinions and stories but make sure they are Scripture soaked.
4. To preach like this requires much study and preparation. Ezra was described as “a ready scribe in the law of Moses” (Ezra 7:6). ‘ready’ = skillful, diligent. Preaching is like cooking.

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

II. The Response to the Book (Vs. 9-12)

A. Conviction (Vs. 9)

1. They wept as the Scriptures were read, indicating a soft and responsive heart.
2. Illustration: George Whitefield's preaching to the coal miners in England
3. Our hearts are often cold and hard to the Word of God

B. Celebration (Vs. 10-12)

1. "joy of the Lord is your strength" – 'strength' = a fortress, a defense
2. Matthew Henry: "Holy joy will be the oil to the wheels of our obedience."
3. The expression of their rejoicing (Vs. 10-12a)
 - a. Feasting
 - b. Giving
 - c. Illustration: Jerusalem Church - Acts 2:46 *"And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,"*
4. The cause of their rejoicing (Vs. 12b)
 - a. Psalm 19:8 *"The statutes of the LORD are right, **rejoicing the heart**: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes."*
 - b. Psalm 119:162 *"I **rejoice** at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil."*
 - c. Jeremiah 15:16 *"Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart..."*
 - d. Psalm 119:72 *"The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver."*
 - e. The Lord's Day is the best day of the week!
 - f. Note: If the Israelites could rejoice so much over the first 5 Books of the Bible, how much more we who possess the completed canon of Scripture (66 Books within the covers of this blessed Book of books)

III. The Rediscovery in the Book (Vs. 13-18)

A. Study of the Word (Vs. 13-15)

1. The key men of the nation assemble to go deeper into the Word of God.
2. 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21 *"Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."*
3. 2 Tim. 2:15 *"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."*
4. As men, we are to know the Word of God in order to help our wives in their understanding of Scripture (1 Cor. 14:35)

B. Submission to the Word (Vs. 16-18)

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

1. Their obedience was full and complete. They were doers of the Word (James 1:21-25)
2. No careless attitude to the detail of Scripture here! No “essential and non-essential” categorization of the Word of God!
3. Feast of Tabernacles had been commemorated since days of Joshua (e.g. Ezra 3:4) but not in the spirit of complete obedience seen here. (Refer Leviticus 23 for laws concerning Feast of Tabernacles)
4. Finney: “A revival is nothing else than a new beginning of obedience to God.”
5. The result of their obedience was great joy (Vs. 17). There is great joy to be experienced in both the understanding and the doing of God’s Word.
6. This dispels the lie of the world and the devil that says a life of obedience to God means a life of drudgery and misery. Because Christ “loved righteousness and hated iniquity” He was “anointed with the oil of gladness above thy fellows” (Hebrews 1:9)
7. John 13:17 *“If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.”*

Conclusion:

1. How highly do we value the Word of God?
2. Do we pay attention to the details of God’s commands or do we brush certain aspects aside as “non-essential”?

Confession & Revival

Text: Nehemiah 9:1-38

Introduction:

1. Chapters 8-10 reveal the three key pillars in spiritual revival: 1. Concentration on the Word (8) 2. Confession of sin (9) 3. Commitment to Holiness. Sequence instructive. God's Word brings light and uncovers our sins. We repent and confess and then resolve to walk differently (repentance = change of mind resulting in change of life)
2. This chapter stands alongside Ezra 9 and Daniel 9 as the great "national prayers" of Israel.
3. Revival involves "turning from our wicked ways" (2 Chr. 7:14)
4. True confession goes beyond admitting our sins in a general way. It involves the "painful and humbling experience of naming specific sins in the presence of God." (Lacey) rehearsal

I. The Process of their Confession (Vs. 1-3)

A. Sacrifice (Vs. 1)

1. In the previous chapter they had been feasting, now they are fasting. God's Word had done its probing work in the conscience.
2. Fasting an important accessory to prayer at certain times.
3. Purpose was to put aside the physical appetites in order to concentrate completely on spiritual things (prayer & God's Word)

B. Sorrow (Vs. 1)

1. 'sackclothes' = made from coarse hair (e.g. goat or camel) and worn in times of mourning
2. "earth upon them" = also a sign of mourning
3. This was evidence of the depth and sincerity of their repentance.

C. Separation (Vs. 2)

1. The wall that had been built symbolized separation from the heathen nations but a personal, heart commitment had to be made on the part of the people of God.
2. A return to separation from the world an integral part of true revival
3. Ezra 6:21 *"And the children of Israel, which were come again out of the captivity, and all such as had separated themselves **from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the LORD God of Israel...**"*
4. 2 Cor. 6:17-18 *"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."*

D. Scriptures (Vs. 3)

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

1. They had been saturated in the Word in the preceding days (chapter 8)
2. The Word of God is again turned to in order to prepare their hearts for true confession.
3. “one fourth” = In Bible times days and nights divided into four parts so this would be 3 hours. Significant time was given to the Word of God. Decline in time given to spiritual matters reveals a serious problem in our churches.
4. Sequence is important: The Word of God, like a mirror, shows us our true state. Like a sword it probes the hidden places of the heart.
5. Butler: “The longer one is in the presence of the Word, the more he will be conscious of his sin. Sometimes when people are growing in the Lord because of spending more time reading the Word, they feel they are becoming more sinful when, in fact, they are becoming more holy. Being in the Word simply made them more aware of their evil conduct, but it has not added to their evil conduct. Being more aware of one’s sins, however, makes one feel he is becoming more evil. When a person falls in the mud in a dark alley, he will not readily see how dirty he has become. But when he progresses towards a street light, he will see his filthiness. And the closer he comes to the light, the dirtier he will see himself. So it is with the Word of God. Little time in the Word means little consciousness of one’s sin. Much time in the Word brings much consciousness of sin in one’s life which promotes repentance as it did in our text.”

II. The Prayer of Confession (Vs. 4-31)

2 themes dominate this prayer: 1. The faithfulness of God 2. The failure of God’s people

A. God’s Character (Vs. 5-6a)

1. His Name is glorious & exalted
2. He alone is God

B. God’s Creative Power (Vs. 6b)

1. He is the Creator of all things
2. He is the Sustainer of all things
3. He is the Receiver of heavenly worship

C. God’s Choice of Abraham (Vs. 7-8)

1. God’s grace towards Abraham
2. God’s fulfilment of His promises – what God says and what God does are in perfect harmony

D. God’s Carrying out of Israel (Vs. 9-11)

1. His power demonstrated in Egypt (Vs. 9a & 10)
2. His power demonstrated at the Red Sea (Vs. 9b & 11)

E. God’s Care in the Wilderness (Vs. 12-15)

1. Direction in the way (Vs. 12)
2. Revelation of God’s Word (Vs. 13-14)
3. Provision of needs (Vs. 15a)
4. Promise of inheritance

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

F. Israel's Callous Disobedience (Vs. 16-22)

Against the backdrop of God's abundant goodness, the evil disobedience of Israel is confessed. Note: Praising the Majesty of God leads to confessing the depravity of man.

1. Israel's failure (Vs. 16-18)
 - a. Pride (Vs. 16) – stubbornness & rebellion. “hardened their necks” = picture of un-submissive ox, refusing the yoke
 - b. Disobedience (Vs. 17a)
 - c. Un-thankfulness (17b)
 - d. Idolatry (Vs. 18)
2. God's forgiveness (Vs. 17)
 - a. God's disposition to mercy – “ready to pardon”, “gracious and merciful”, “slow to anger”, “of great kindness”
 - b. Isaiah 28:21 – Judgment is His strange work
 - c. “ manifold mercies” (Vs. 19) – abundant in quality and quantity
3. God's faithfulness (Vs. 19-23)

He “forsook them not” (See also Vs. 17). Evidence of this enumerated:

 - a. He led them (Vs. 19)
 - b. He taught them (Vs. 20a)
 - c. He fed them (Vs. 20b)
 - d. He sustained them (Vs. 21)
 - e. He provided for them (Vs. 22)
 - f. He multiplied them (Vs. 23)

G. God's Conquering of Canaan (Vs. 23-25)

1. God kept His promise (Vs. 23)
2. God gave victory over the enemy (Vs. 24)
3. God blessed them abundantly (Vs. 25)

H. Israel's Cycle of Compromise (Vs. 26-31)

1. Rebellion
 - a. Note: They rebelled despite all the blessings described in the previous verse (Vs. 25). We are vulnerable to backslidings in times of prosperity as well as times of adversity. (See Deut. 8:6-18)
 - b. “cast thy law behind their backs” = disregard for the Scriptures
 - c. “slew they prophets” = silenced God's spokesmen
 - d. “great provocations” = God had shown them “great kindness” (Vs. 17) and “great goodness” (Vs. 25), yet in return they gave “great provocations”
2. Chastisement
3. Supplication
4. Deliverance
5. Relapse

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

III. The Plea in their Confession (Vs. 32-38)

A. The fervency of the plea (Vs. 32)

1. 'therefore' = request uttered in light of God's faithful, gracious dealings with Israel in the past
2. "seem little before thee" = "let our affliction be regarded by thee as great and heavy"

B. The humility of the plea (Vs. 33-35)

1. God's justice declared (Vs. 33) Acknowledgement the punishment is deserved is a good sign of repentance.
2. Man's sinfulness confessed (Vs. 34-35)
 - a. Specific confession
 - b. Finney: "Self-examination consists in looking at your lives, in considering your actions, in calling up the past, and learning its true character. Look back over your past history. Take up your individual sins one by one and look at them. I do not mean that you should just glance at your past life, and see that it has been full of sins, and then go to God and make a sort of general confession and ask for pardon. That is not the way. You must take them up one by one...General confessions of sin will never do. Your sins were committed one by one; and as far as you can come at them, they ought to be reviewed and repented of one by one." Pg. 36-37
 - c. Sins of past linked to the present bondage

C. The honesty of the plea (Vs. 36-37)

1. They were in bondage to heathen kings
2. They were in great distress

D. The sincerity of the plea (Vs. 38)

Conclusion:

1. How much time and attention are we giving to spiritual growth? E.g. Fasting, prayer & the Word of God
2. Are we turning from our "wicked ways" and confessing our sins before the Lord?

Holiness & Revival

Text: Nehemiah 10:1-39

Introduction:

1. Chapters 8-10 reveal the three key pillars in spiritual revival: 1. The Word of God (8) 2. Repentance & confession of sin (9) 3. Practical holiness (10)
2. In this chapter, the people of God put their confession into action and commit to a covenant to walk in obedience to God's Word. Their repentance more than just words.

I. The Signatories of the Covenant (Vs. 1-27)

84 people signed their names to this covenant

A. The National Leader (Vs. 1a)

1. 'Nehemiah' = set the example for God's people. Important that those in leadership lead God's people in their quest for practical godliness.
2. 'Tirshatha' = Persian title for Governor

B. The Spiritual Leaders (Vs. 1b-13)

1. The priests (Vs. 1-8)
2. The Levites (Vs. 9-13)
3. Note: Some of the names already mentioned in the previous chapter show up in this list (e.g. Jeshua, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Hodija, Hashabniah, Sherebiah, Bani). These men prayed **and** practiced!
4. Illustration: In a certain church, there was a man who always ended his prayers with, "And, Lord, clean the cobwebs out of my life! Clean the cobwebs out of my life!" One of the members of the church became weary of hearing this same insincere request week after week, because he saw no change in the petitioner's life. So, the next time he heard the man pray, "Lord, clean the cobwebs out of my life!" he interrupted with, "And while you're at it, Lord, kill the spider!" (Wiersbe)

C. The Civil Leaders (Vs. 14-27)

1. "chief of the people" = these men were representatives of the families in Israel
2. Note: It is a blessing when the men of a church "sign up" to the godly vision of God's leaders rather than sitting passive, indifferent or outright opposed to a godly direction.

II. The Supporters of the Covenant (Vs. 28)

A. The Leaders (Vs. 28a)

1. The rest of those in key ministry positions
2. E.g. Singers, porters
3. Highlights the tremendous unity amongst the people of God in this decision

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

B. The Laymen (Vs. 28b)

1. Separated people
 - a. Observe the two aspects of separation – ‘from’ and ‘unto’
 - b. Note: It is the separated Christian who will take holy living seriously. Compromised believers see little value in purity of life.
2. Commitment of whole families
 - a. ‘clave’ (Vs. 29) = to hold fast. They **strongly** supported the covenant
 - b. Spouses – ‘wives’
 - c. Children – “every one having knowledge and having understanding” Young people need to live godly lives as well as older people
 - d. Note: A church is made up of families and the individual strength of each family contributes or contracts something from the strength of the church as a whole.

III. The Subject of the Covenant (Vs. 29)

A. The Words describing the Covenant (29a)

1. “curse...oath” = they made a vow to God.
2. ‘curse’ = reveals the seriousness of the covenant. They were calling for Divine chastisement upon them if they failed to do as they had vowed. This was likely based on the blessings and curses of Deuteronomy 28

B. The Walk committed to in the Covenant (29b)

1. ‘walk’ = they would seek to pattern their lifestyle in accordance with Scripture
2. ‘all’ = comprehensive. They were committed to a sold out, whole-hearted obedience to God’s Word
3. John 15:10 *“If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love.”*
4. 1John 2:5 *“But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected:”*

IV. The Specifics of the Covenant (Vs. 30-39)

Three specific areas are highlighted from the covenant. Covenant was more than a general commitment to holiness.

A. Commitment to Godly Marriages (Vs. 30)

1. Parental leadership & involvement – parental blessing important **is** important for a marriage!
2. Destructive nature of unsanctified marriages already highlighted in the Book previously (6:18-19)
3. Nehemiah also reminds them of Solomon’s downfall in 13:26.

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

4. “As long as we love each other, it will work out!” Question should not be “will it work out?” but “will this marriage enjoy God’s blessing and fulfill God’s will.”

5. 2 Cor. 6:14 “*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers:*”

B. Commitment to God’s Day (Vs. 31)

1. The three Sabbaths

- a. Weekly Sabbath
- b. Special Sabbaths – e.g. feast days like the ones described in Chapter 8 & 9
- c. Seventh Year Sabbath – rest for the land & relief for the needy
- d. Key underlying principles: Obedience to God’s Word, focus given to spiritual things rather than material things

2. The N.T. Lord’s Day

- a. Not the Sabbath but should be cherished as a day of worship, rest and service
 - i. Christ rose from the dead on a Sunday
 - ii. Coming of Holy Spirit on a Sunday (Day of Pentecost)
 - iii. Lord’s Table observed on Sunday (Acts 20:7)
 - iv. Preaching of God’s Word on Sunday (Acts 20:7)
 - v. Offerings given on Sunday (1 Cor. 10:1-2)
 - vi. Apostle John “in the Spirit on the Lord’s day” (Rev. 1:10)
- b. Practical challenges
 - i. Be an ESC not a SMO or a SNO! Prioritize your schedule! “...and we will **not forsake** the house of our God.” (Vs. 39b) Heb. 10:25 “**Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.**”
 - ii. Make spiritual things the focus! E.g. a day free of internet browsing and news reading
 - iii. Moody on the Sunday Paper:

Their contents make them unfit for reading any day, not to say Sunday. Some New York dailies advertise Sunday editions of sixty pages. Many dirty pieces of scandal in this and other countries are raked up and put into them. "Eight pages of fud"- that is splendid reading for Sunday, isn't it? Even when a so-called sermon is printed, it is completely buried by the fiction and news matter. It is time that ministers went into their pulpits and preached against Sunday newspapers if they haven't done it already.

Put the man in the scales that buys and reads Sunday papers. After reading them for two or three hours he might go and hear the best sermon in the world, but you couldn't preach anything into him. His mind is filled up with what he has read, and there is no room for thoughts of God. **I believe that the archangel Gabriel himself could not make an impression on an audience that has its head full of such trash.** If you bored a hole into a man's head, you could not inject any thoughts of God and heaven. Ladies buy the Sunday papers and read the advertisements of Monday bargains to see what they can buy cheap. Just so with their religion. They are willing to have it if it doesn't cost

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

anything. If Christian men and women refused to buy them, if Christian merchants refused to advertise in them, they would soon die out, because that is where they get most of their support.

They tell me the Sunday paper has come to stay, and I may as well let it alone. Never! I believe it is a great evil, and I shall fight it while I live. I never read a Sunday paper, and wouldn't have one in my house. They are often sent me, but I tear them up without reading them. I will have nothing to do with them. They do more harm to religion than any other one agency I know. Their whole influence is against keeping the Sabbath holy. They are an unnecessary evil. Can't a man read enough news on weekdays without desecrating the Sabbath? We had no Sunday papers till the war came, and we got along very well without them. They have been increasing in size and in number ever since then, and I think they have been lowering their tone ever since. If you believe that, help to fight them too. Stamp them out, beginning with yourself.

- iv. What would Moody say to our generation of Facebook frolicking, Twitter tittering, Google plus gaggling, Web wandering Christians who haven't got enough love for God's Day to give it a break for at least one day and focus on God and His Word.

C. Commitment to God's House (Vs. 32-39)

The house of God is mentioned in every verse (9 times total). Same phrase used to describe N.T. church - "...*the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*" (1 Timothy 3:15). The text reveals that **giving** was at the heart of their support of the house of God. Note the four offerings in the text:

1. The Temple Tax (3rd) (Vs. 32-33)
 - a. It's origin – first introduced by Moses (Ex. 30:11-16) and used to make the sockets upon which the tabernacle rested and the hooks for the pillars (Ex. 38:25-28). It was collected every time there was a census. In time it was used to support the wider ministry of God's house. In Nehemiah's day, they went beyond the "letter of the law" and made it an annual offering.
 - b. It's use – "for the service of the house of our God" (Vs. 32) & "for all the work of the house of our God"
 - c. Principle: They gave to cover the running expenses of God's House
2. The Wood Offering (Vs. 34)
 - a. May have seemed insignificant on the surface but a necessity for the fire that was to be continually burning on the altar (Lev. 6:12-13)
 - b. Principle: They gave to specific needs
3. The First fruits Offering (Vs. 35-37a)
 - a. Note the word 'first' appears 5 times – 'firstfruits', 'firstborn', 'firstlings'
 - b. Principles taught: 1. Priority – giving to God before anyone or anything else 2. Quality – giving the best to God, the "cream of the crop"

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

- c. Prov. 3:9-10 *“Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with **the firstfruits of all thine increase**: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.”*
 - d. How different is this to the prevalent attitude of giving God our leftovers, our unwanted junk, or worst still, nothing at all!
4. The Tithe Offering (Vs. 37b-39)
- a. The use of the tithes (37b). Was used for the support of the Levites (Num. 18:21).
 - i. Full time servants of the Gospel are to be supported (1. Cor. 9:13-14; 1 Tim. 5:17) *“A timeless yardstick by which we judge any group of people claiming to be the Lord’s, is their treatment of the Lord’s servants who are among them.”* (S. Carson)
 - ii. Mal. 3:8 *“Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.”*
 - b. The collection of the tithes (Vs. 38). Received by the Levites, with one of the sons of Aaron (priests) present. Accountability important in the administration of God’s money.
 - c. The storage of the tithes (Vs. 39). They were kept in the ‘chambers’ of the temple to be distributed as needed.
 - d. N.T. Scriptures
 - i. 1 Cor. 16:2 *“Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, **as God hath prospered him**, that there be no gatherings when I come.”* (proportionate giving)
 - ii. 2 Cor. 9:6-8 *“But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as **he purposeth in his heart**, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:”*
 - iii. Illustration: Widow’s 2 mites (Luke 21:1-4). ‘mite’ = a small copper coin worth about one-eighth of a cent. Reveals God’s perspective on giving. God judges giving not so much on the amount given but, on the amount, retained. A lot of sinning goes on in the name of stewardship!
 - iv. Challenge: When the offering bag comes our way, do we approach it in the spirit of worship?

Conclusion: Are we pursuing a life of practical godliness? **Read Church Covenant**

Sacrificing for God's Work

Text: Nehemiah 11-12

Introduction:

1. In these two chapters we reach the climax of the book with the finalization of the resettlement of Jerusalem (Chapter 11) and the dedication of the rebuilt walls (Chapter 12)
2. The theme of sacrifice runs through both chapters. We will note 3 sacrifices that were made in these two chapters:

I. The Sacrifice of Themselves (11:1-12:26)

A. The Direction of God's will (Vs. 1)

1. Note condition of Jerusalem in 7:4
2. "casting lots" = an O.T. method of determining God's will
3. Prov. 16:33 *"The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD."*
4. Land divided by lot under Joshua: *"And Joshua cast lots for them in Shiloh before the LORD..."* (18:8)

B. The Dedication of the volunteers (Vs. 2)

1. "willingly offered" = there were some who didn't have to be asked! They had surrendered hearts to the will of God.
2. D.L. Moody: "A great many people have got a false idea about the church. They have got an idea that the church is a place to rest in...to get into a nicely cushioned pew, and contribute to the charities, listen to the minister, and do their share to keep the church out of bankruptcy, is all they want. The idea of work for them – actual work in the church – never enters their minds."

C. The Details of the people (Vs. 11:3-12:26)

This list of names can be broken up into three broad categories:

1. The city dwellers (11:3-24)
 - a. Names of those willing to move to Jerusalem mentioned.
 - b. Reminder that God keeps a record of the sacrifices we make for Him and He will reward us at the Judgment Seat of Christ.
2. The country dwellers (11:25-36)
 - a. Names not mentioned. Less commitment and sacrifice required to stay in a familiar, more tranquil place.
 - b. Some famous towns mentioned such as Ziklag.
3. The forerunners (12:1-26)
 - a. "Nehemiah goes back almost 100 years to the time of Zerubbabel & Joshua and the first returnees from exile in Babylon. He names the priestly and Levitical families up to his own time...Nehemiah was acknowledging that all of them had

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

played a part in reaching this point when the wall of Jerusalem was built and about to be dedicated.” (Lacey)

- b. Note: These men of faith pioneered the return to Jerusalem and prepared the way for the re-building of the walls. We may not always be given the privilege of seeing the long-term fruits of our labors. Some are called to a work of preparation and sowing, others to reaping. Illustration: David’s preparation for the building of the temple (Read 1 Chr. 17 & 29)

II. The Sacrifice of Thanksgiving (12:27-42)

Thanksgiving mentioned repeatedly in these verses (Vs. 27, 31, 38, 40, 46) Hebrews 13:15 *“By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.”*

A. The Call to Thanksgiving (Vs. 27-29)

1. “gathered themselves together” = the principle of assembly. The need for collective, unified praise!
2. Levites and singers would play an important role in leading God’s people in praise. True praise and worship that glorifies God involves order, structure and sequence.

B. The Cleansing before Thanksgiving (Vs. 30)

1. Purity preceded praise! (See Psalm 15)
2. Purification of priests, people and place.
 - a. Purification of this nature usually involved the washing of clothes and person in water. Likely included sin offerings. So, there was the washing of water and washing of the blood.
 - b. N.T. Application: The water of the Word and the blood of Christ are the cleansing agents for the believer, to prepare him for worship (Eph. 5:26; John 15:3; 1 John 1:7, 9)
 - c. Three times in God’s Word we are exhorted to “worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness” (1 Chr. 16:29; Ps. 29:2; 96:9). Our worship is to be holy, pure and distinct from the world.
 - d. “A polluted congregation will hinder a consecration service. The very thought of coming before God for worship and consecration ought to promote purity.” (Butler)
3. Note: While the primary lesson here is spiritual, there is still something to be said for physical hygiene and cleanliness as part of our preparation for coming to God’s House. “Cleanliness is next to godliness”. Get cleaned up before you come to the house of God and arrange yourself appropriately.

C. The Contemplation of Thanksgiving (Vs. 31-39)

1. People divided into two companies (Vs. 31)
 - a. Ezra’s Company (Vs. 32-37) – moved in an anticlockwise direction along the wall.

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

- b. Nehemiah's Company (Vs. 38-39) – moved in a clockwise direction
 - c. Starting point likely somewhere near the valley gate.
 - d. Walls thick in Bible times. Cities such as Nineveh had walls wide enough to drive several chariots side by side on the top of the walls. (Butler)
2. This tour of the walls would have produced feelings of great joy and gladness as they viewed what God had empowered them to accomplish. In like manner, our hearts will be stirred to thanksgiving when we take the time to consider all that God has done for us.

D. The Contents of their Thanksgiving (Vs. 40-42)

1. Joyful Praise – 'gladness' (Vs. 27); 'rejoiced' (Vs. 43); 'rejoice' (Vs. 43); "great joy" (Vs. 43); 'rejoiced' (Vs. 43); 'joy' (Vs. 43); 'rejoiced' (Vs. 44). God was the source of this joy (Vs. 43) *"Make a joyful noise unto the LORD..."* (Psalm 100:1)
2. Powerful Praise – *"the singers sang loud"* (Vs. 42); *"the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off"* (Vs. 43) (See Psalm 126:2)
3. Tuneful Praise – 'cymbals, psalteries...harps' (Vs. 27); 'trumpets' (Vs. 35, 41); *"musical instruments of David the man of God"* (Vs. 36)
4. Structured Praise – *"And the singers sang loud, with Jezrahiah their overseer."* (Vs. 42). Service was executed "decently and in order"

III. The Sacrifice of Their Things (12:43-47)

A. Offerings of Sacrifices (Vs. 43)

1. Generous sacrifices – "great sacrifices"
2. Joyous sacrifices – "and rejoiced"
3. *"...It is more blessed to give than to receive."* (Acts 20:35)

B. Offerings of Substance (Vs. 44a)

1. 'firstfruits...tithes' = they made good on the covenant they made (chapter 10)
2. It is not hard to give of our substance when our hearts are filled with thankfulness for what God has done.

C. Offerings of Support (Vs. 44b-47)

1. These offerings served the needs of God's ministers.
 - a. Vs. 44 - "for the priests and Levites"
 - b. Vs. 47 "gave the portions of the singers and the porters..."
 - c. 1 Corinthians 9:7-14
2. This support was given with a good attitude
 - a. *"...for Judah rejoiced for the priests and Levites that waited."* (Vs. 44)
 - b. 1 Timothy 5:17-18 *"Let the elders that rule well be **counted** worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word"*

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, the labourer is worthy of his reward.”

Conclusion: Are we sacrificing for God’s work? To what degree are we committed?

Backslidings

Text: Nehemiah 13:1-31

Introduction:

1. This chapter documents the spiritual decline of the nation during Nehemiah's leave of absence (Vs. 6). Nehemiah had been governor in Judah for 12 years (5:14). "after certain days" Nehemiah returns to find that there has been deterioration amongst the people of God.
2. In chapter 10 the people made promises to God in a number of areas (e.g. separation from the heathen, support for God's house & godly marriages) but now they have backslidden from those commitments.
3. We will note the backslidings of the people of God in four areas and Nehemiah's steps to bring about spiritual recovery.

They were backslidden in their...

I. Separation (Vs. 1-9)

There was a breakdown of separation amongst:

A. The People (Vs. 1-3)

1. The specifics of the problem
 - a. "the mixed multitude" = the mixed multitude also caused Moses problems (Ex. 12:38; Num. 11:4). A collapse of separatism always involves a "mixing" of evil with good. In this chapter we see mixed multitudes (Vs. 3), mixed marriages (Vs. 23) and mixed speech (Vs. 24). When evil is mixed with good, evil exerts its pernicious influence, not the other way around. Illustration: Mixing pure and impure water.
 - b. "Ammonite and the Moabite" = decedents of Lot's incestuous relationship with his daughters and avowed enemies of God's people. They were forbidden entry into the fellowship of God's people (Deut. 23:3). To fail in the area of separation is to fail in the area of obedience to the Lord and His Word.
2. The solution to the problem
 - a. "read in the book of Moses" (Vs. 1) "when they had heard the law" (Vs. 3). The reading of the Word of God was what brought about spiritual revival and reformation.
 - b. "on that day" = almost reads as if this took place during dedication ceremony of chapter 12 but Vs. 4 and 6 indicate that this took place as a separate incident.

B. The Priesthood (leadership) (Vs. 4-9)

1. The specifics of the problem (Vs. 4-5)
 - a. Unholy friendships (Vs. 4)

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

- i. 'allied' = translated elsewhere 'near' over 30 times and 'nigh' 12 times. They had a close friendship.
 - ii. Why was Eliashib allied to Tobiah? Answer found in 6:17-19 & 13:28
 - iii. Prov. 13:20 *"He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed."*
 - b. Unholy priorities (Vs. 5)
 - i. Misuse of authority and God's property for evil.
 - ii. Enemy of God's people (rebel) given priority over God's servants, the Levites (Vs. 10)
 - iii. Butler: "This cruel action is not unique. Rather, it is the typical action of those who honour the world above the things of God. Whenever room is made in God's house for the ungodly, the godly will be cruelly pushed out. Whenever honour is given by the church to the carnal, the spiritual will be dishonoured."
2. The solution to the problem (Vs. 6-9)
- a. Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem (Vs. 6). In the absence of a godly leader, the compromises rise up and seek to peddle their wicked agenda.
 - b. Nehemiah was grieved (Vs. 7-8). Nehemiah's response was right and correct. Compromise in the house of God should make us upset and heart-broken.
 - c. Nehemiah took action (Vs. 8b-9). Nehemiah literally threw Tobiah's things out of the chamber and cleansed the temple. In this he was a type of Christ who twice cleansed the temple during His earthly ministry (John 2:13-16; Matt. 21:12-13)
 - d. Butler: "Many will not approve of Nehemiah's strong action here. They will accuse him of being harsh, unkind, uncharitable, unchristian and unloving. But the same bunch will never lift up a protest about Eliashib's actions. Eliashib was harsh, unkind, uncharitable, unchristian, and unloving to the Levites, the true servants of God, when he brought Tobiah into the Temple. That is the action to condemn, not the action of Nehemiah throwing out of the Temple the furnishings of Tobiah the arch-enemy of God and His work. Do not accuse the pastor and other leaders of the church of being unchristian when they take a strong stand against sin and apostasy. It is those who sin and embrace apostasy that are unchristian."

II. Support (Vs. 10-14)

A. The Retraction of the support (Vs. 10)

1. In chapter 10:39 they had promised "we will not forsake the house of our God."
2. When compromise comes into the church, a problem in the giving of the people arises.
3. Priority had been given to the enemy over the godly men.
4. The consequence was that these men had to go and find other ways to support themselves. The word 'fled' is the same word translated 'chased' in Vs. 28. These men were forced out of their position due to Tobiah's presence.

B. The Rectification of the support (Vs. 11-14)

1. Nehemiah confronted the problem source (Vs. 11a).

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

- a. 'contended' = 3 times in this chapter it is said that Nehemiah contended with compromise (Vs. 11, 17, 25). Sin and compromise has to be confronted boldly.
- b. 'rulers' = the primary ones responsible for the situation
2. Nehemiah restored God's servants to their office (Vs. 11b)
3. Nehemiah appointed faithful oversight (Vs. 12-13) "counted faithful" = the indispensable qualification for handling God's money
4. Nehemiah prayed to God (Vs. 14). This was not Nehemiah's words before men but his plea before God. Nehemiah's desire was for God's approval upon his service. Nehemiah's godly walk and prayer life again highlighted.

III. Sabbaths (Vs. 15-22)

A. The Pollution of the Sabbath (Vs. 15-16)

1. There was working (Vs. 15a) The Sabbath was being treated like any other work day (e.g. harvesting, fruit gathering)
2. There was selling (Vs. 15b). 'victuals' = provisions, food
3. There was purchasing (Vs. 16)
4. Note: The N.T. Lord's Day is not a "Christian Sabbath." However, the principle of setting aside the every day things of life (e.g. shopping, maintenance, work etc...) is applicable. The early church made Sunday special. It was a day for the assembling of the church, the reading and preaching of God's Word, observance of the ordinances, fellowship and worship.

B. The Preservation of the Sabbath (Vs. 17-22)

1. Nehemiah warned of sin and its consequences (Vs. 17-18). He named sin for what it is, 'evil'. He reminded them of God's past judgment of the nation for such sins. We need to warn God's people of both the character and consequences of sin.
2. Nehemiah set a watch on the gates (Vs. 19). Nehemiah was proactive in taking steps to eliminate compromise from the people of God.
3. Nehemiah rebuked those who persisted (Vs. 20-21). There will always be those who test the line of separation that has been drawn by God's man. They hover like flies on the fringes in the hopes they will draw some away from the protection of the walls of separation.

IV. Spouses (Vs. 23-31)

A. Unequal yokes in the people (Vs. 23-27)

1. The specifics of the problem
 - a. Marriage to women of 'Ashdod' = key city of the Philistines
 - b. Marriage to women of "Ammon & Moab" = decedents of Lot

Building for God – Nehemiah Series

- c. These unholy unions bore fruit in the children. Their speech was mixed (Vs. 24)
 - d. These unions would be the equivalent to unequal yokes as they apply to us today. Note: Not teaching interracial marriage is wrong. Rahab, Ruth and Moses' Ethiopian wife examples of ladies from other nations who married into Israel.
2. The solution to the problem
- a. Nehemiah confronted them (Vs. 25)
 - b. Nehemiah cursed them (Vs. 25). Doesn't mean he lost his cool and uttered foul language. It means he invoked a Divine curse (judgment) upon them for their actions.
 - c. Nehemiah chastised them (Vs. 25)
 - i. 'smote' = likely a flogging in accordance with the rules outlined in Deut. 25:2-3
 - ii. "plucked off their hair" = to make bald, to shave. This was a great shame in those days (See 2. Sam. 10:4-5)
 - d. Nehemiah corrected them (Vs. 26-27). He reminded them of the fact that heathen women had been the ruination of Solomon, a man who experienced God's favor and blessing like few others (e.g. wisdom, peace, prosperity)

B. Unequal yokes in the priesthood (Vs. 28-31)

1. Grandson of Eliashib (Vs. 28)
2. Nehemiah's last prayer (Vs. 29-31)
 - a. Remember them (Vs. 29). This is the most powerful action Nehemiah took in relation to the compromises. He handed them over to the Omniscient, All-powerful God for His just dealings.
 - b. Remember me (Vs. 30-31). Book ends in prayer with Nehemiah again asking God to look upon his service favorably.

Conclusion:

1. Has there ever been a time in your life when you were closer to the Lord than you are now? If so, you are likely backslidden.
2. Are we backslidden in any of these four areas? Separation? Support of God's house? The Lord's Day? Choice of marriage partner?